

THE
DEFENCE OF GUENEVERE
THE
LIFE AND DEATH OF JASON
AND OTHER POEMS

BY
WILLIAM MORRIS



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THE DEFENCE OF GUENEVERE
AND OTHER POEMS

1858

TO MY FRIEND

DANTE GABRIEL ROSSETTI

PAINTER

I DEDICATE THESE POEMS

THE DEFENCE OF GUENEVERE

BUT, knowing now that they would have her
speak,

She threw her wet hair backward from her brow,
Her hand close to her mouth touching her cheek,

As though she had had there a shameful blow,
And feeling it shameful to feel ought but shame
All through her heart, yet felt her cheek burned
so,

She must a little touch it ; like one lame
She walked away from Gauwaine, with her head
Still lifted up ; and on her cheek of flame

The tears dried quick ; she stopped at last and
said : 10

‘ O knights and lords, it seems but little skill
To talk of well-known things past now and dead.

¶ God wot I ought to say, I have done ill,
And pray you all forgiveness heartily !
Because you must be right such great lords—
still

‘ Listen, suppose your time were come to die,
And you were quite alone and very weak ;
Yea, laid a dying while very mightily

‘ The wind was ruffling up the narrow streak
Of river through your broad lands running well :
Suppose a hush should come, then some one
speak : 21

4 THE DEFENCE OF GUENEVERE

“ One of these cloths is heaven, and one is hell,
Now choose one cloth for ever, which they be,
I will not tell you, you must somehow tell

“ Of your own strength and mightiness ; here,
see ! ”

Yea, yea, my lord, and you to ope your eyes,
At foot of your familiar bed to see

‘ A great God’s angel standing, with such dyes,
Not known on earth, on his great wings, and
hands,

Held out two ways, light from the inner skies 29

‘ Showing him well, and making his commands
‘ Seem to be God’s commands, moreover, too,
Holding within his hands the cloths on wands ;

‘ And one of these strange choosing cloths was
blue,

Wavy and long, and one cut short and red ;
No man could tell the better of the two.

‘ After a shivering half-hour you said,
“ God help ! heaven’s colour, the blue ; ” and
he said, “ hell.”

Perhaps you then would roll upon your bed,

‘ And cry to all good men that loved you well,
“ Ah Christ ! if only I had known, known,
known ; ” 41

Launcelot went away, then I could tell,

‘ Like wisest man how all things would be, moan,
And roll and hurt myself, and long to die,
And yet fear much to die for what was sown.

' Nevertheless you, O Sir Gauwaine, lie,
 Whatever may have happened through these
 years,
 God knows I speak truth, saying that you lie.'

Her voice was low at first, being full of tears,
 But as it cleared, it grew full loud and shrill,
 Growing a windy shriek in all men's ears, 51

A ringing in their startled brains, until
 She said that Gauwaine lied, then her voice sunk,
 And her great eyes began again to fill

Though still she stood right up, and never
 shrunk;
 But spoke on bravely, glorious lady fair !
 Whatever tears her full lips may have drunk,

She stood, and seemed to think, and wrung her
 hair, 58
 Spoke out at last with no more trace of shame,
 With passionate twisting of her body there :

' It chanced upon a day that Launcelot came
 To dwell at Arthur's court : at Christmas-time
 This happened ; when the heralds sung his
 name,

" Son of King Ban of Benwick," seemed to
 chime
 Along with all the bells that rang that day,
 O'er the white roofs, with little change of
 rhyme.

' Christmas and whitened winter passed away,
 And over me the April sunshine came,
 Made very awful with black hail-clouds, yea

THE DEFENCE OF GUENEVERE 7

' Of stretched hands catching small stones by
the way,

Until one surely reached the sea at last,
And felt strange new joy as the worn head lay

' Back, with the hair like sea-weed ; yea all
past 100

Sweat of the forehead, dryness of the lips,
Washed utterly out by the dear waves o'ercast

' In the lone sea, far off from any ships !
Do I not know now of a day in Spring ?
No minute of that wild day ever slips

' From out my memory ; I hear thrushes sing,
And wheresoever I may be, straightway
Thoughts of it all come up with most fresh sting ;

' I was half mad with beauty on that day,
And went without my ladies all alone, 110
In a quiet garden walled round every way ;

' I was right joyful of that wall of stone,
That shut the flowers and trees up with the sky,
And trebled all the beauty : to the bone,

' Yea right through to my heart, grown very shy
With weary thoughts, it pierced, and made me
glad ;

Exceedingly glad, and I knew verily,

' A little thing just then had made me mad ;
I dared not think, as I was wont to do,
Sometimes, upon my beauty ; if I had 120

' Held out my long hand up against the blue,
And, looking on the tenderly darken'd fingers,
Thought that by rights one ought to see quite
through,

6 THE DEFENCE OF GUENEVERE

' And in the Summer I grew white with flame,
And bowed my head down—Autumn, and the
sick 71

Sure knowledge things would never be the same,

' However often Spring might be most thick
Of blossoms and buds, smote on me, and I grew
Careless of most things, let the clock tick, tick,

' To my unhappy pulse, that beat right through
My eager body ; while I laughed out loud,
And let my lips curl up at false or true,

' Seemed cold and shallow without any cloud.
Behold my judges, then the cloths were
brought : 80

While I was dizzied thus, old thoughts would
crowd,

' Belonging to the time ere I was bought
By Arthur's great name and his little love,
Must I give up for ever then, I thought,

' That which I deemed would ever round me move
Glorifying all things ; for a little word,
Scarce ever meant at all, must I now prove

' Stone-cold-for ever ? Pray you, does the Lord
Will that all folks should be quite happy and
good ?

I love God now a little, if this cord 90

' Were broken, once for all what striving could
Make me love anything in earth or heaven.
So day by day it grew, as if one should

' Slip slowly down some path worn smooth and
even,

Down to a cool sea on a summer day ;
Yet still in slipping was there some small leaven

THE DEFENCE OF GUENEVERE 7

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Until one surely reached the sea at last,
And felt strange new joy as the worn head lay

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And, looking on the tenderly darken'd fingers,
Thought that by rights one ought to see quite
through,

8 THE DEFENCE OF GUENEVERE

' There, see you, where the soft still light yet
lingers,

Round by the edges ; what should I have done,
If this had joined with yellow spotted singers,

' And startling green drawn upward by the sun ?
But shouting, loosed out, see now ! all my hair,
And trancedly stood watching the west wind run

' With faintest half-heard breathing sound—why
there 130

I lose my head e'en now in doing this ;
But shortly listen—In that garden fair

' Came Launcelot walking ; this is true, the kiss
Wherewith we kissed in meeting that spring day,
I scarce dare talk of the remember'd bliss,

' When both our mouths went wandering in one
way,

And aching sorely, met among the leaves ;
Our hands being left behind strained far away.

' Never within a yard of my bright sleeves
Had Launcelot come before—and now, so nigh !
After that day why is it Guenevere grieves ?

' Nevertheless you, O Sir Gauwaine, lie, 142
Whatever happened on through all those years,
God knows I speak truth, saying that you lie.

' Being such a lady could I weep these tears
If this were true ? A great queen such as I
Having sinn'd this way, straight her conscience
sears ;

' And afterwards she liveth hatefully,
Slaying and poisoning, certes never weeps,—
Gauwaine be friends now, speak me lovingly.

THE DEFENCE OF GUENEVERE 9

' Do I not see how God's dear pity creeps 151
All through your frame, and trembles in your
mouth ?

Remember in what grave your mother sleeps,

' Buried in some place far down in the south,
Men are forgetting as I speak to you ;
By her head sever'd in that awful drouth

' Of pity that drew Agravaine's fell blow,
I pray your pity ! let me not scream out
For ever after, when the shrill winds blow

' Through half your castle-locks ! let me not
shout 160

For ever after in the winter night
When you ride out alone ! in battle-rout

' Let not my rusting tears make your sword
light !

Ah ! God of mercy how he turns away !
So, ever must I dress me to the fight,

' So—let God's justice work ! Gauwaine, I say,
See me hew down your proofs : yea all men know
Even as you said how Mellyagraunce one day,

' One bitter day in *la Fausse Garde*, for so
All good knights held it after, saw— 170
Yea, sirs, by cursed unknighly outrage ; though

' You, Gauwaine, held his word without a flaw,
This Mellyagraunce saw blood upon my bed—
Whose blood then pray you ? is there any law

' To make a queen say why some spots of red
Lie on her coverlet ? or will you say,
" Your hands are white, lady, as when you wed,

10 THE DEFENCE OF GUENEVERE

“ Where did you bleed ? ” and must I stammer
out—“ Nay,

I blush indeed, fair lord, only to rend 179
My sleeve up to my shoulder, where there lay

“ A knife-point last night : ” so must I defend
The honour of the lady Guenevere ?
Not so, fair lords, even if the world should end

“ This very day, and you were judges here
Instead of God. Did you see Mellyagraunce
When Launcelot stood by him ? what white fear

“ Curdled his blood, and how his teeth did dance,
His side sink in ? as my knight cried and said,
“ Slayer of unarm’d men, here is a chance !

“ “ Setter of traps, I pray you guard your head,
By God I am so glad to fight with you, 191
Stripper of ladies, that my hand feels lead

“ “ For driving weight ; hurrah now ! draw and
do,
For all my wounds are moving in my breast,
And I am getting mad with waiting so.”

“ He struck his hands together o’er the beast,
Who fell down flat, and grovell’d at his feet,
And groan’d at being slain so young—“ at least.”

“ My knight said, “ Rise you, sir, who are so fleet
At catching ladies, half-arm’d will I fight, 200
My left side all uncovered ! ” then I weet;

“ Up sprang Sir Mellyagraunce with great delight
Upon his knave’s face ; not until just then
Did I quite hate him, as I saw my knight

THE DEFENCE OF GUENEVERE 11

' Along the lists look to my stake and pen
With such a joyous smile, it made me sigh
From agony beneath my waist-chain, when

' The fight began, and to me they drew nigh ;
Ever Sir Launcelot kept him on the right,
And traversed warily, and ever high 210

' And fast leapt caitiff's sword, until my knight
Sudden threw up his sword to his left hand,
Caught it, and swung it ; that was all the fight.

' Except a spout of blood on the hot land ;
For it was hottest summer ; and I know
I wonder'd how the fire, while I should stand,

' And burn, against the heat, would quiver so,
Yards above my head ; thus these matters went ;
Which things were only warnings of the woe

' That fell on me. Yet Mellyagraunce was
shent, 220
For Mellyagraunce had fought against the Lord ;
Therefore, my lords, take heed lest you be blent

' With all this wickedness ; say no rash word
Against me, being so beautiful ; my eyes,
Wept all away to grey, may bring some sword

' To drown you in your blood , see my breast
rise,
Like waves of purple sea, as here I stand ;
And how my arms are moved in wonderful wise,

' Yea also at my full heart's strong command,
See through my long throat how the words
go up 230
In ripples to my mouth ; how in my hand

‘ The shadow lies like wine within a cup
Of marvellously colour’d gold ; yea now
This little wind is rising, look you up,

‘ And wonder how the light is falling so
Within my moving tresses : will you dare,
When you have looked a little on my brow,

‘ To say this thing is vile ? or will you care
For any plausible lies of cunning woof, 23
When you can see my face with no lie there

‘ For ever ? am I not a gracious proof—
“ But in your chamber Launcelot was found ”—
Is there a good knight then would stand aloof,

‘ When a queen says with gentle queenly sound :
“ O true as steel come now and talk with me,
I love to see your step upon the ground

‘ “ Unwavering, also well I love to see
That gracious smile light up your face, and hear
Your wonderful words, that all mean verily

‘ “ The thing they seem to mean : good friend,
so dear 250
To me in everything, come here to-night.
Or else the hours will pass most dull and drear ;

‘ “ If you come not, I fear this time I might
Get thinking over much of times gone by,
When I was young, and green hope was in
sight ;

‘ “ For no man cares now to know why I sigh ;
And no man comes to sing me pleasant songs,
Nor any brings me the sweet flowers that lie

THE DEFENCE OF GUENEVERE 13

' "So thick in the gardens ; therefore one so
longs

To see you, Launcelot ; that we may be 260
Like children once again, free from all wrongs

' "Just for one night." Did he not come to me ?
What thing could keep true Launcelot away
If I said "come" ? there was one less than three

' In my quiet room that night, and we were gay ;
Till sudden I rose up, weak, pale, and sick,
Because a bawling broke our dream up, yea

' I looked at Launcelot's face and could not
speak,

For he looked helpless too, for a little while ;
Then I remember how I tried to shriek, 27

' And could not, but fell down ; from tile to tile
The stones they threw up rattled o'er my head,
And made me dizzier ; till within a while

' My maids were all about me, and my head
On Launcelot's breast was being soothed away
From its white chattering, until Launcelot said—

' By God ! I will not tell you more to-day,
Judge any way you will—what matters it ?
You know quite well the story of that fray,

' How Launcelot still'd their bawling, the mad
fit 280

That caught up Gauwaine—all, all, verily,
But just that which would save me ; these
things flit.

' Nevertheless you, O Sir Gauwaine, lie,
Whatever may have happen'd these long years,
God knows I speak truth, saying that you lie !

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' All I have said is truth, by Christ's dear tears.'
She would not speak another word, but stood
Turn'd sideways ; listening, like a man who
hears

His brother's trumpet sounding through the
wood

Of his foes' lances. She lean'd eagerly, 290
And gave a slight spring sometimes, as she could

At last hear something really ; joyfully
Her cheek grew crimson, as the headlong speed
Of the roan charger drew all men to see,
The knight who came was Launcelot at good
need.

KING ARTHUR'S TOMB

Hot August noon—already on that day
Since sunrise through the Wiltshire downs,
most sad

Of mouth and eye, he had gone leagues of way ;
Ay and by night, till whether good or bad

He was, he knew not, though he knew perchance
That he was Launcelot, the bravest knight
Of all who since the world was, have borne lance,
Or swung their swords in wrong cause or in
right.

Nay, he knew nothing now, except that where
The Glastonbury gilded towers shine, 10
A lady dwelt, whose name was Guenevere ;
This he knew also ; that some fingers twine,

Not only in a man's hair, even his heart,
(Making him good or bad I mean,) but in his
life,

Skies, earth, men's looks and deeds, all that has
part,

Not being ourselves, in that half-sleep, half-
strife,

(Strange sleep, strange strife,) that men call
living ; so

Was Launcelot most glad when the moon rose,
Because it brought new memories of her—' Lo,
Between the trees a large moon, the wind lows

' Not loud, but as a cow begins to low, 21
Wishing for strength to make the herdsman
hear :

The ripe corn gathereth dew ; yea, long ago,
In the old garden life, my Guenevere

' Loved to sit still among the flowers, till night
Had quite come on, hair loosen'd, for she said,
Smiling like heaven, that its fairness might
Draw up the wind sooner to cool her head.

' Now while I ride how quick the moon gets
small,

As it did then—I tell myself a tale 30
That will not last beyond the whitewashed wall,
Thoughts of some joust must help me through
the vale,

' Keep this till after—How Sir Gareth ran
A good course that day under my Queen's
eyes,

And how she sway'd laughing at Dinadan—
No—back again, the other thoughts will rise,

' And yet I think so fast 'twill end right soon—
Verily then I think, that Guenevere,
Made sad by dew and wind, and tree-barred
moon,

Did love me more than ever, was more dear

' To me than ever, she would let me lie 41
And kiss her feet, or, if I sat behind,
Would drop her hand and arm most tenderly,
And touch my mouth. And she would let
me wind

' Her hair around my neck, so that it fell
Upon my red robe, strange in the twilight
With many unnamed colours, till the bell
Of her mouth on my cheek sent a delight

' Through all my ways of being ; like the stroke
Wherewith God threw all men upon the face
When he took Enoch, and when Enoch woke
With a changed body in the happy place.

' Once, I remember, as I sat beside, 53
She turn'd a little, and laid back her head,
And slept upon my breast : I almost died
In those night-watches with my love and
dread,

' There lily-like she bow'd her head and slept,
And I breathed low, and did not dare to
move, 58
But sat and quiver'd inwardly, thoughts crept,
And frighten'd me with pulses of my Love.

' The stars shone out above the doubtful green
Of her boddice, in the green sky overhead ;
Pale in the green sky were the stars I ween,
Because the moon shone like a star she shed

- ‘ When she dwelt up in heaven a while ago,
And ruled all things but God · the night
went on,
The wind grew cold, and the white moon grew
low,
One hand had fallen down, and now lay on
‘ My cold stiff palm ; there were no colours then
For near an hour, and I fell asleep 70
In spite of all my striving, even when
I held her whose name-letters make me leap.
‘ I did not sleep long, feeling that in sleep
I did some loved one wrong, so that the sun
Had only just arisen from the deep
Still land of colours, when before me one
‘ Stood whom I knew, but scarcely dared to
touch,
She seemed to have changed so in the night ;
Moreover she held scarlet lilies, such 79
As Maiden Margaret bears upon the light
‘ Of the great church walls, nathless did I walk
Through the fresh wet woods, and the wheat
that morn,
Touching her hair and hand and mouth, and talk
Of love we held, nigh hid among the corn.
‘ Back to the palace, ere the sun grew high,
We went, and in a cool green room all day
I gazed upon the arras giddily, .
Where the wind set the silken kings a-sway,
‘ I could not hold her hand, or see her face ;
For which may God forgive me ! but I think,
Howsoever, that she was not in that place.’ 91
These memories Launcelot was quick to drink ;

And when these fell, some paces past the wall,
 There rose yet others, but they wearied more,
 And tasted not so sweet ; they did not fall
 So soon, but vaguely wrenched his strained
 heart sore

In shadowy slipping from his grasp ; these gone,
 A longing followed ; if he might but touch
 That Guenevere at once ! Still night, the lone
 Grey horse's head before him vex'd him
 much,

100

In steady nodding over the grey road—
 Still night, and night, and night, and emptied
 heart
 Of any stories ; what a dismal load
 Time grew at last, yea, when the night did
 part,

And let the sun flame over all, still there
 The horse's grey ears turn'd this way and
 that,
 And still he watch'd them twitching in the glare
 Of the morning sun, behind them still he sat,

Quite wearied out with all the wretched night,
 Until about the dustiest of the day,
 On the last down's brow he drew his rein in
 sight

110

Of the Glastonbury roofs that choke the way.

And he was now quite giddy as before,
 When she slept by him, tired out and her
 hair

Was mingled with the rushes on the floor,
 And he, being tired too, was scarce aware

Of her presence ; yet as he sat and gazed,
A shiver ran throughout him, and his breath
Came slower, he seem'd suddenly amazed,
As though he had not heard of Arthur's death.

This for a moment only, presently 121
He rode on giddy still, until he reach'd
A place of apple-trees, by the thorn-tree
Wherefrom St. Joseph in the days past
preached.

Dazed there he laid his head upon a tomb,
Not knowing it was Arthur's, at which sight
One of her maidens told her, ' he is come,'
And she went forth to meet him ; yet a blight

Had settled on her, all her robes were black,
With a long white veil only ; she went slow,
As one walks to be slain, her eyes did lack
Half her old glory, yea, alas ! the glow 132

Had left her face and hands ; this was because
As she lay last night on her purple bed,
Wishing for morning, grudging every pause
Of the palace clocks, until that Launcelot's
head

Should lie on her breast, with all her golden hair
Each side—when suddenly the thing grew
drear,

In morning twilight, when the grey downs bare
Grew into lumps of sin to Guenevere. 140

At first she said no word, but lay quite still,
Only her mouth was open, and her eyes
Gazed wretchedly about from hill to hill ;
As though she asked, not with so much
surprise

As tired disgust, what made them stand up
there

So cold and grey. After, a spasm took
Her face, and all her frame, she caught her hair,
All her hair, in both hands, terribly she shook,

And rose till she was sitting in the bed,
Set her teeth hard, and shut her eyes and
seem'd

As though she would have torn it from her head,
Natheless she dropp'd it, lay down, as she
deem'd

It matter'd not whatever she might do—

O Lord Christ ! pity on her ghastly face !
Those dismal hours while the cloudless blue
Drew the sun higher—He did give her grace ;

Because at last she rose up from her bed,
And put her raiment on, and knelt before
The blessed rood, and with her dry lips said,
Muttering the words against the marble floor :

' Unless you pardon, what shall I do, Lord,
But go to hell ? and there see day by day
Foul deed on deed, hear foulest word on word,
For ever and ever, such as on the way

' To Camelot I heard once from a churl,
That curled me up upon my jennet's neck
With bitter shame ; how then, Lord, should
I curl

For ages and for ages ? dost thou reckon

' That I am beautiful, Lord, even as you
And your dear Mother ? why did I forget
You were so beautiful, and good, and true,
That you loved me so, Guenevere ? O yet

' If even I go to hell, I cannot choose 173
But love you, Christ, yea, though I cannot
keep

From loving Launcelot ; O Christ ! must I lose
My own heart's love ? see, though I cannot
weep,

' Yet am I very sorry for my sin ;
Moreover, Christ, I cannot bear that hell,
I am most fain to love you, and to win 179
A place in heaven some time—I cannot tell—

' Speak to me, Christ ! I kiss, kiss, kiss your feet ;
Ah ! now I weep ! '—The maid said, ' By the
tomb

He waiteth for you, lady, ' coming fleet,
Not knowing what woe filled up all the room.

So Guenevere rose and went to meet him there,
He did not hear her coming, as he lay
On Arthur's head, till some of her long hair
Brush'd on the new-cut stone—' Well done !
to pray 188

' For Arthur, my dear lord, the greatest king
That ever lived.' ' Guenevere ! Guenevere !
Do you not know me, are you gone mad ? fling
Your arms and hair about me, lest I fear

' You are not Guenevere, but some other thing.'
' Pray you forgive me, fair lord Launcelot !
I am not mad, but I am sick ; they cling,
God's curses, unto such as I am ; not

' Ever again shall we twine arms and lips.'
' Yea, she is mad : thy heavy law, O Lord,
Is very tight about her now, and grips
Her poor heart, so that no right word 200

' Can reach her mouth ; so, Lord, forgive her
 now,
 That she not knowing what she does, being
 mad,
 Kills me in this way—Gueenever, bend low
 And kiss me once ! for God's love kiss me !
 sad

' Though your face is, you look much kinder
 now ;
 Yea once, once for the last time kiss me, lest
 I die.'

' Christ ! my hot lips are very near his brow,
 Help me to save his soul !—Yea, verily,

' Across my husband's head, fair Launcelot !
 Fair serpent mark'd with V upon the head !
 This thing we did while yet he was alive, 211
 Why not, O twisting knight, now he is dead ?

' Yea, shake ! shake now and shiver ! if you can
 Remember anything for agony,
 Pray you remember how when the wind ran
 One cool spring evening through fair aspen-
 tree,

' And elm and oak about the palace there,
 The king came back from battle, and I stood
 To meet him, with my ladies, on the stair,
 My face made beautiful with my young blood.'

' Will she lie now, Lord God ? ' ' Remember too,
 Wrung heart, how first before the knights
 there came 222
 A royal bier, hung round with green and blue,
 About it shone great tapers with sick flame.

- ' And thereupon Lucius, the Emperor,
Lay royal-robed, but stone-cold now and dead,
Not able to hold sword or sceptre more,
But not quite grim ; because his cloven head
' Bore no marks now of Launcelot's bitter sword,
Being by embalmers deftly solder'd up ;
So still it seem'd the face of a great lord, 231
Being mended as a craftsman mends a cup.
- ' Also the heralds sung rejoicingly
To their long trumpets ; " Fallen under shield,
Here lieth Lucius, King of Italy,
Slain by Lord Launcelot in open field."
- ' Thereat the people shouted " Launcelot ! "
And through the spears I saw you drawing
nigh,
You and Lord Arthur—nay, I saw you not,
But rather Arthur, God would not let die,
- ' I hoped, these many years, he should grow
great, 241
And in his great arms still encircle me,
Kissing my face, half-blinded with the heat
Of king's love for the queen I used to be.
- ' Launcelot, Launcelot, why did he take your
hand,
When he had kissed me in his kingly way ?
Saying, " This is the knight whom all the land
Calls Arthur's banner, sword, and shield to-
day ;
- ' " Cherish him, love." Why did your long lips
cleave
In such strange way unto my fingers then ?
So eagerly glad to kiss, so loath to leave 251
When you rose up ? Why among helmed men

' Could I always tell you by your long strong
arms,

And sway like an angel's in your saddle there ?
Why sicken'd I so often with alarms

Over the tilt-yard ? Why were you more fair
Than aspens in the autumn at their best ?

Why did you fill all lands with your great fame,
So that Breuse even, as he rode, fear'd lest

At turning of the way your shield should
flame ?

260

' Was it nought then, my agony and strife ?

When as day passed by day, year after year,
I found I could not live a righteous life ?

Didst ever think queens held their truth for
dear ?

' O, but your lips say, " Yea, but she was cold
Sometimes, always uncertain as the spring ;
When I was sad she would be overbold, 267
Longing for kisses ; " when war-bells did ring,

' The back-toll'd bells of noisy Camelot.'—

' Now, Lord God, listen ! listen, Guenevere,
Though I am weak just now, I think there's not
A man who dares to say, " You hated her,

" And left her moaning while you fought your
fill

In the daisied meadows ; " lo you her thin
hand,

That on the carven stone can not keep still,

Because she loves me against God's command,

' Has often been quite wet with tear on tear,

Tears Launcelot keeps somewhere, surely not
In his own heart, perhaps in Heaven, where
He will not be these ages.'—' Launcelot !

' Grim curses out of Peter and of Paul ;
Judging of strange sins in Leviticus ; 310
Another sort of writing on the wall,
Scored deep across the painted heads of us.

' Christ sitting with the woman at the well,
And Mary Magdalen repenting there,
Her dimmed eyes scorch'd and red at sight of
hell
So hardly 'scaped, no gold light on her hair.

' And if the priest said anything that seem'd
To touch upon the sin they said we did,—
(This in their teeth) they look'd as if they deem'd
That I was spying what thoughts might be hid

' Under green-cover'd bosoms, heaving quick
Beneath quick thoughts ; while they grew
red with shame, 322
And gazed down at their feet—while I felt sick,
And almost shriek'd if one should call my name.

' The thrushes sang in the lone garden there—
But where you were the birds were scared
I trow—
Clanging of arms about pavilions fair,
Mixed with the knights' laughs ; there, as
I well know,

' Rode Launcelot, the king of all the band,
And scowling Gauwaine, like the night in day,
And handsome Gareth, with his great white hand
Curl'd round the helm-crest, ere he join'd the
fray ; 332

' And merry Dinadan with sharp dark face,
All true knights loved to see ; and in the fight
Great Tristram, and though helmed you could
trace

In all his bearing the frank noble knight ;
' And by him Palomydes, helmet off,
He fought, his face brush'd by his hair,
Red heavy swinging hair ; he fear'd a scoff
So overmuch, though what true knight would
dare 340

' To mock that face, fretted with useless care,
And bitter useless striving after love ?
O Palomydes, with much honour bear
Beast Glatysaunt upon your shield, above
' Your helm that hides the swinging of your hair,
And think of Iseult, as your sword drives
through

Much mail and plate—O God, let me be there
A little time, as I was long ago ! 348

' Because stout Gareth lets his spear fall low,
Gauwaine, and Launcelot, and Dinadan
Are helm'd and waiting ; let the trumpets go !
Bend over, ladies, to see all you can !

' Clench teeth, dames, yea, clasp hands, for
Gareth's spear

Throws Kay from out his saddle, like a stone
From a castle-window when the foe draws near—
" Iseult ! "—Sir Dinadan rolleth overthrown.

' " Iseult ! "—again—the pieces of each spear
Fly fathoms up, and both the great steeds
reel ;

" Tristram for Iseult ! " " Iseult ! " and
" Guenevere,"

The ladies' names bite verily like steel. 360

They bite—bite me, Lord God!—I shall go mad,
 Or else die kissing him, he is so pale,
 He thinks me mad already, O bad ! bad !
 Let me lie down a little while and wail.'

No longer so, rise up, I pray you, love,
 And slay me really, then we shall be heal'd,
 Or perchance, in the aftertime by God above.'
 'Banner of Arthur—with black-bended shield
 Sinister-wise across the fair gold ground ! 369

Here let me tell you what a knight you are,
 A sword and shield of Arthur ! you are found
 A crooked sword, I think, that leaves a scar
 On the bearer's arm, so be he thinks it straight,
 Twisted Malay's crease beautiful blue-grey,
 Poison'd with sweet fruit ; as he found too late,
 My husband Arthur, on some bitter day !

O sickle cutting hemlock the day long !
 That the husbandman across his shoulder
 hangs,
 And, going homeward about evensong,
 Dies the next morning, struck through by the
 fangs ! 380

Banner, and sword, and shield, you dare not
 pray to die,
 Lest you meet Arthur in the other world,
 And, knowing who you are, he pass you by,
 Taking short turns that he may watch you
 curl'd

Body and face and limbs in agony,
 Lest he weep presently and go away,
 Saying, "I loved him once," with a sad sigh—
 Now I have slain him, Lord, let me go too,
 I pray. [LAUNCELOT falls.

' Alas, alas ! I know not what to do,
If I run fast it is perchance that I 390
May fall and stun myself, much better so,
Never, never again ! not even when I die.'

LAUNCELOT, *on awaking.*

' I stretch'd my hands towards her and fell
down,
How long I lay in swoon I cannot tell :
My head and hands were bleeding from the
stone,
When I rose up, also I heard a bell.' 396

SIR GALAHAD, A CHRISTMAS MYSTERY

It is the longest night in all the year,
Near on the day when the Lord Christ was
born ;
Six hours ago I came and sat down here,
And ponder'd sadly, wearied and forlorn.
The winter wind that pass'd the chapel-door,
Sang out a moody tune, that went right well
With mine own thoughts : I look'd down on the
floor,
Between my feet, until I heard a bell
Sound a long way off through the forest deep,
And toll on steadily ; a drowsiness 10
Came on me, so that I fell half asleep,
As I sat there not moving : less and less
I saw the melted snow that hung in beads
Upon my steel-shoes ; less and less I saw
Between the tiles the bunches of small weeds :
Heartless and stupid, with no touch of awe

Upon me, half-shut eyes upon the ground,
I thought ; O ! Galahad, the days go by,
Stop and cast up now that which you have
found, 19
So sorely you have wrought and painfully.

Night after night your horse treads down alone
The sere damp fern, night after night you sit
Holding the bridle like a man of stone,
Dismal, unfriended, what thing comes of it.

And what if Palomydes also ride,
And over many a mountain and bare heath
Follow the questing beast with none beside ?
Is he not able still to hold his breath

With thoughts of Iseult ? doth he not grow pale
With weary striving, to seem best of all 30
To her, ' as she is best,' he saith ? to fail
Is nothing to him, he can never fall.

For unto such a man love-sorrow is
So dear a thing unto his constant heart,
That even if he never win one kiss,
Or touch from Iseult, it will never part.

And he will never know her to be worse
Than in his happiest dreams he thinks she is :
Good knight, and faithful, you have 'scaped the
curse
In wonderful-wise ; you have great store of
bliss. 40

Yea, what if Father Launcelot ride out,
Can he not think of Guenevere's arms, round,
Warm and lithe, about his neck, and shout
Till all the place grows joyful with the sound ?

And when he lists can often see her face,
And think, ' Next month I kiss you, or next
week,

And still you think of me : ' therefore the place
Grows very pleasant, whatsoever he seek.

But me, who ride alone, some carle shall find
Dead in my arms in the half-melted snow,
When all unkindly with the shifting wind, 51
The thaw comes on at Candlemas : I know

Indeed that they will say : ' This Galahad
If he had lived had been a right good knight ;
Ah ! poor chaste body ! ' but they will be glad,
Not most alone, but all, when in their sight

That very evening in their scarlet sleeves
The gay-dress'd minstrels sing ; no maid will
talk

Of sitting on my tomb, until the leaves,
Grown big upon the bushes of the walk, 60

East of the Palace-pleasaunce, make it hard
To see the minster therefrom : well-a-day !
Before the trees by autumn were well bared,
I saw a damozel with gentle play,

Within that very walk say last farewell
To her dear knight, just riding out to find
(Why should I choke to say it ?) the Sangreal,
And their last kisses sunk into my mind,

Yea, for she stood lean'd forward on his breast,
Rather, scarce stood ; the back of one dear
hand, 70

That it might well be kiss'd, she held and press'd
Against his lips ; long time they stood there,
fann'd

By gentle gusts of quiet frosty wind,
Till Mador de la porte a-going by,
And my own horsehoofs roused them ; the
untwined,
And parted like a dream. In this way I,

With sleepy face bent to the chapel floor,
Kept musing half asleep, till suddenly
A sharp bell rang from close beside the door,
And I leapt up when something pass'd me by

Shrill ringing going with it, still half blind 8
I stagger'd after, a great sense of awe
At every step kept gathering on my mind,
Thereat I have no marvel, for I saw

One sitting on the altar as a throne,
Whose face no man could say he did not know,
And though the bell still rang, he sat alone,
With raiment half blood-red, half white as
snow.

Right so I fell upon the floor and knelt,
Not as one kneels in church when mass is
said, 90
But in a heap, quite nerveless, for I felt
The first time what a thing was perfect dread.

But mightily the gentle voice came down :
' Rise up, and look and listen, Galahad,
Good knight of God, for you will see no frown
Upon my face ; I come to make you glad.

' For that you say that you are all alone,
I will be with you always, and fear not
You are uncared for, though no maiden moan
Above your empty tomb ; for Launcelot,

‘ He in good time shall be my servant too, 101
Meantime, take note whose sword first made
him knight,

And who has loved him alway, yea, and who
Still trusts him alway, though in all men’s
sight,

‘ He is just what you know, O Galahad,
This love is happy even as you say,
But would you for a little time be glad,
To make ME sorry long day after day ?

‘ Her warm arms round his neck half-throttle Me,
The hot love-tears burn deep like spots of
lead, 110

Yea, and the years pass quick : right dismally
Will Launcelot at one time hang his head ;

‘ Yea, old and shrivell’d he shall win my love.
Poor Palomydes fretting out his soul !
Not always is he able, son, to move
His love, and do it honour : needs must roll

‘ The proudest destrier sometimes in the dust,
And then ’tis weary work ; he strives beside
Seem better than he is, so that his trust
Is always on what chances may betide ; 120

‘ And so he wears away, my servant, too,
When all these things are gone, and wretchedly
He sits and longs to moan for Iseult, who
Is no care now to Palomydes : see,

‘ O good son Galahad, upon this day,
Now even, all these things are on your side,
But these you fight not for ; look up, I say,
And see how I can love you, for no pride

'Closes your eyes, no vain lust keeps them down.
See now you have ME always ; following
That holy vision, Galahad, go on, 131
Until at last you come to Me to sing

' In Heaven always, and to walk around
The garden where I am : ' he ceased, my face
And wretched body fell upon the ground ;
And when I look'd again, the holy place

Was empty ; but right so the bell again
Came to the chapel-door, there entered
Two angels first, in white, without a stain,
And scarlet wings, then after them a bed,

Four ladies bore, and set it down beneath 141
The very altar-step, and while for fear
I scarcely dared to move or draw my breath,
These holy ladies gently came a-near,

And quite unarm'd me, saying : ' Galahad,
Rest here awhile and sleep, and take no
thought
Of any other thing than being glad ;
Hither the Sangreal will be shortly brought,

' Yet must you sleep the while it stayeth here.'
Right so they went away, and I, being weary.
Slept long and dream'd of Heaven : the bell
comes near, 151
I doubt it grows to morning. Miserere !

*Enter Two Angels in white, with scarlet wings
also Four Ladies in gowns of red and green .
also an Angel, bearing in his hands a surcoat
of white, with a red cross.*

AN ANGEL.

O servant of the high God, Galahad !

Rise and be arm'd, the Sangreal is gone forth
Through the great forest, and you must be had
Unto the sea that lieth on the north :

There shall you find the wondrous ship wherein
The spindles of King Solomon are laid,
And the sword that no man draweth without sin,
But if he be most pure : and there is stay'd,

Hard by, Sir Launcelot, whom you will meet
In some short space upon that ship : first,
though, 162

Will come here presently that lady sweet,
Sister of Percival, whom you well know,
And with her Bors and Percival : stand now,
These ladies will to arm you.

FIRST LADY, *putting on the hauberke.*
Galahad,

That I may stand so close beneath your brow,
I, Margaret of Antioch, am glad.

SECOND LADY, *girding him with the sword.*
That I may stand and touch you with my hand,
O Galahad, I, Cecily, am glad. 170

THIRD LADY, *buckling on the spurs.*
That I may kneel while up above you stand,
And gaze at me, O holy Galahad,
I, Lucy, am most glad.

FOURTH LADY, *putting on the basnet.*
O gentle knight,
That you bow down to us in reverence,
We are most glad, I, Katherine, with delight
Must needs fall trembling.

ANGEL, *putting on the crossed surcoat.*
Galahad, we go hence,

For here, amid the straying of the snow,
Come Percival's sister, Bors, and Percival.
[*The Four Ladies carry out the bed,*
and all go but Galahad.

GALAHAD.

How still and quiet everything seems now :
They come, too, for I hear the horsehoofs
fall. 180

Enter Sir Bors, Sir Percival, and his Sister.
Fair friends and gentle lady, God you save !
A many marvels have been here to-night ;
Tell me what news of Launcelot you have,
And has God's body ever been in sight ?

SIR BORS.

Why, as for seeing that same holy thing,
As we were riding slowly side by side,
An hour ago, we heard a sweet voice sing,
And through the bare twigs saw a great light
glide,

With many-colour'd raiment, but far off,
And so pass'd quickly—from the court nought
good ; 190
Poor merry Dinadan, that with jape and scoff
Kept us all merry, in a little wood

Was found all hack'd and dead : Sir Lionel
And Gauwaine have come back from the great
quest,
Just merely shamed ; and Lauvaine, who loved
well
Your father Launcelot, at the king's behest
Went out to seek him, but was almost slain,
Perhaps is dead now ; everywhere
The knights come foil'd from the great quest, in
vain ;
In vain they struggle for the vision fair. 200

THE CHAPEL IN LYONESS¹

SIR OZANA LE CURE HARDY. SIR GALAHAD.
SIR BORS DE GANYS.

SIR OZANA.

ALL day long and every day,
From Christmas-Eve to Whit-Sunday,
Within that Chapel-aisle I lay,
And no man came a-near.

Naked to the waist was I,
And deep within my breast did lie,
Though no man any blood could spy,
The truncheon of a spear.

No meat did ever pass my lips.
Those days—(Alas ! the sunlight slips 10
From off the gilded parclose, dips,
And night comes on apace.)

¹ This poem had previously appeared in *The Oxford and Cambridge Magazine*, September 1856.

My arms lay back behind my head ;
Over my raised-up knees was spread
A samite cloth of white and red ;
A rose lay on my face.

Many a time I tried to shout ;
But as in dream of battle-rout,
My frozen speech would not well out ;
I could not even weep.

20

With inward sigh I see the sun
Fade off the pillars one by one,
My heart faints when the day is done,
Because I cannot sleep.

Sometimes strange thoughts pass through my
head ;

Not like a tomb is this my bed,
Yet oft I think that I am dead ;
That round my tomb is writ,

'Ozana of the hardy heart,

Knight of the Table Round,

30

Pray for his soul, lords, of your part ;
A true knight he was found.'

Ah ! me, I cannot fathom it.

[*He sleeps.*]

SIR GALAHAD.

All day long and every day,
Till his madness pass'd away,
I watch'd Ozana as he lay
Within the gilded screen.

All my singing moved him not ;
As I sung my heart grew hot,
With the thought of Launcelot
Far away, I ween.

40

So I went a little space
From out the chapel, bathed my face
In the stream that runs apace
By the churchyard wall.

There I pluck'd a faint wild rose,
Hard by where the linden grows
Sighing over silver rows
Of the lilies tall.

I laid the flower across his mouth ; 50
The sparkling drops seem'd good for drouth ;
He smiled, turn'd round toward the south,
Held up a golden tress.

The light smote on it from the west :
He drew the covering from his breast,
Against his heart that hair he prest ;
Death him soon will bless.

SIR BORS.

I enter'd by the western door ;
I saw a knight's helm lying there :
I raised my eyes from off the floor, 60
And caught the gleaming of his hair.

I stept full softly up to him ;
I laid my chin upon his head ;
I felt him smile ; my eyes did swim,
I was so glad he was not dead.

I heard Ozana murmur low,
' There comes no sleep nor any love.'
But Galahad stoop'd and kiss'd his brow :
He shiver'd ; I saw his pale lips move.

SIR OZANA.

There comes no sleep nor any love ; 70

Ah me ! I shiver with delight.

I am so weak I cannot move ;

God move me to thee, dear, to-night !

Christ help ! I have but little wit :

My life went wrong ; I see it writ,

' Ozana of the hardy heart,

Knight of the Table Round,

Pray for his soul, lords, on your part ;

A good knight he was found.' 79

Now I begin to fathom it. [*He dies.*]

SIR BORS.

Galahad sits dreamily :

What strange things may his eyes see,

Great blue eyes fix'd full on me ?

On his soul, Lord, have mercy.

SIR GALAHAD.

Ozana, shall I pray for thee ?

Her cheek is laid to thine ;

No long time hence, also I see

Thy wasted fingers twine

Within the tresses of her hair

That shineth gloriously, 90

Thinly outspread in the clear air

Against the jasper sea.¹

¹ In place of the last six lines *The Oxford and Cambridge Magazine*, September 1856, has these two :

Her hair against the jasper sea
Wondrously doth shine.

SIR PETER HARPDON'S END

In an English Castle in Poictou.

Sir PETER HARPDON, *a Gascon knight in the English service*, and JOHN CURZON, *his lieutenant*.

JOHN CURZON.

OF those three prisoners, that before you came
We took down at St. John's hard by the mill,
Two are good masons ; we have tools enough,
And you have skill to set them working.

SIR PETER.

So—

What are their names ?

JOHN CURZON.

Why, Jacques Aquadent,
And Peter Plombiere, but—

SIR PETER.

What colour'd hair
Has Peter now ? has Jacques got bow legs ?

JOHN CURZON.

Why, sir, you jest—what matters Jacques' hair,
Or Peter's legs to us ?

SIR PETER.

O ! John, John, John !
Throw all your mason's tools down the deep
well, 10
Hang Peter up and Jacques ; they're no good,
We shall not build, man.

JOHN CURZON [*going*].

Shall I call the guard
To hang them, sir ? and yet, sir, for the tools,
We'd better keep them still ; sir, fare you well.

[*Muttering as he goes.*

What have I done that he should jape at me ?
And why not build ? the walls are weak enough,
And we've two masons and a heap of tools.

[*Goes, still muttering.*

SIR PETER.

To think a man should have a lump like that
For his lieutenant ! I must call him back,
Or else, as surely as St. George is dead, 20
He'll hang our friends the masons—here, John !
John !

JOHN CURZON.

At your good service, sir.

SIR PETER.

Come now, and talk
This weighty matter out ; there—we've no stone
To mend our walls with,—neither brick nor
stone.

JOHN CURZON.

There is a quarry, sir, some ten miles off.

SIR PETER.

We are not strong enough to send ten men
Ten miles to fetch us stone enough to build,
In three hours' time they would be taken or
slain, 28
The cursed Frenchmen ride abroad so thick.

JOHN CURZON.

But we can send some villaynes to get stone.

SIR PETER.

Alas ! John, that we cannot bring them back,
They would go off to Clisson or Sanxere,
And tell them we were weak in walls and men,
Then down go we ; for, look you, times are
changed,

34

And now no longer does the country shake
At sound of English names ; our captains fade
From off our muster-rolls. At Lusac bridge

I dare say you may even yet see the hole
That Chandos beat in dying ; far in Spain
Pembroke is prisoner, Phelton prisoner here ;
Manny lies buried in the Charterhouse ;

41

Oliver Clisson turn'd these years ago ;
The Captal died in prison ; and, over all,
Edward the prince lies underneath the ground,
Edward the king is dead, at Westminster
The carvers smooth the curls of his long beard.
Everything goes to rack—eh ! and we too.

Now, Curzon, listen ; if they come, these French,
Whom have I got to lean on here, but you ?

A man can die but once, will you die then, 50
Your brave sword in your hand, thoughts in
your heart

Of all the deeds we have done here in France—
And yet may do ? So God will have your soul,
Whoever has your body.

JOHN CURZON.

Why, sir, I
Will fight till the last moment, until then

44 SIR PETER HARPDON'S END

Will do whate'er you tell me. Now I see
 We must e'en leave the walls; well, well,
 perhaps
 They're stronger than I think for; pity, though!
 For some few tons of stone, if Guesclin comes.

SIR PETER.

Farewell, John, pray you watch the Gascons
 well, 60
 I doubt them.

JOHN CURZON.

Truly, sir, I will watch well. [*Goes.*

SIR PETER.

‘Farewell, good lump! and yet, when all is said,
 ’Tis a good lump. Why then, if Guesclin comes;
 Some dozen stones from his petrariae,
 And, under shelter of his crossbows, just
 An hour’s steady work with pickaxes,
 Then a great noise—some dozen swords and
 glaives
 A-playing on my basnet all at once,
 And little more cross purposes on earth
 For me.

Now this is hard: a month ago, 70
 And a few minutes’ talk had set things right
 ’Twixt me and Alice;—if she had a doubt,
 As (may Heaven bless her!) I scarce think she
 had,
 ’Twas but their hammer, hammer in her ears,
 Of ‘how Sir Peter fail’d at Lusac bridge:’
 And ‘how he was grown moody of late days;’
 And ‘how Sir Lambert’ (think now!) ‘his dear
 friend,

Do I kneel here, and can you doubt me ? Yea,
 (For she would put her hands upon my face,)
 'Yea, that is best, yea feel, love, am I changed ?'
 And she would say : ' Good knight, come, kiss my
 lips ! '

And afterwards as I sat there would say :

' Please a poor silly girl by telling me
 What all those things they talk of really were,
 For it is true you did not help Chandos, 111
 And true, poor love ! you could not come to me
 When I was in such peril.'

I should say :

' I am like Balen, all things turn to blame—
 I did not come to you ? At Bergerath
 The constable had held us close shut up,
 If from the barriers I had made three steps,
 I should have been but slain ; at Lusac, too,
 We struggled in a marish half the day,
 And came too late at last : you know, my love,
 How heavy men and horses are all arm'd. 121
 All that Sir Lambert said was pure, unmix'd,
 Quite groundless lies ; as you can think, sweet
 love.'

She, holding tight my hand as we sat there,
 Started a little at Sir Lambert's name,
 But otherwise she listen'd scarce at all
 To what I said. Then with moist, weeping eyes,
 And quivering lips, that scarcely let her speak,
 She said, ' I love you.'

Other words were few,
 The remnant of that hour ; her hand smooth'd
 down 130
 My foolish head ; she kiss'd me all about

My face, and through the tangles of my beard
Her little fingers crept.

O ! God, my Alice,
Not this good way : my lord but sent and said
That Lambert's sayings were taken at their
worth,

Therefore that day I was to start, and keep
This hold against the French ; and I am here,—

* [Looks out of the window.
A sprawling lonely gard with rotten walls,
And no one to bring aid if Guesclin comes,
Or any other.

There's a pennon now ! 140
At last.

But not the constable's, whose arms,
I wonder, does it bear ? Three golden rings
On a red ground ; my cousin's by the rood !
Well, I should like to kill him, certainly,
But to be kill'd by him—

[A trumpet sounds.
That's for a herald ;
I doubt this does not mean assaulting yet.

Enter JOHN CURZON.
What says the herald of our cousin, sir ?

JOHN CURZON.
So please you, sir, concerning your estate,
He has good will to talk with you.

SIR PETER.
Outside,
I'll talk with him, close by the gate St. Ives. 150
Is he unarm'd ?

JOHN CURZON.

Yea, sir, in a long gown.

SIR PETER.

Then bid them bring me hither my furr'd gown
 With the long sleeves, and under it I'll wear,
 By Lambert's leave, a secret coat of mail ;
 And will you lend me, John, your little axe ?
 I mean the one with Paul wrought on the blade ?
 And I will carry it inside my sleeve,
 Good to be ready always—you, John, go
 And bid them set up many suits of arms, ¹⁵⁹
 Bows, archgays, lances, in the base-court, and
 Yourself, from the south postern setting out,
 With twenty men, be ready to break through
 Their unguarded rear when I cry out 'St. George!'

JOHN CURZON.

How, sir ! will you attack him unawares,
 And slay him unarm'd ?

SIR PETER.

Trust me, John, I know
 The reason why he comes here with sleeved
 gown,
 Fit to hide axes up. So, let us go.

[*They go.*]

*Outside the castle by the great gate ; Sir Lambert
 and Sir Peter seated ; guards attending each,
 the rest of Sir Lambert's men drawn up about
 a furlong off.*

SIR PETER.

And if I choose to take the losing side
 Still, does it hurt you ?

SIR LAMBERT.

O ! no hurt to me ; 169
 I see you sneering, ' Why take trouble then,
 Seeing you love me not ? ' look you, our house
 (Which, taken altogether, I love much)
 Had better be upon the right side now,
 If, once for all, it wishes to bear rule
 As such a house should : cousin, you're too wise
 To feed your hope up fat, that this fair France
 Will ever draw two ways again ; this side
 The French, wrong-headed, all a-jar
 With envious longings ; and the other side
 The order'd English, orderly led on 180
 By those two Edwards through all wrong and
 right,
 And muddling right and wrong to a thick broth'
 With that long stick, their strength. This is all
 changed,
 The true French win, on either side you have
 Cool-headed men, good at a tilting match,
 And good at setting battles in array,
 And good at squeezing taxes at due time ;
 Therefore by nature we French being here 188
 Upon our own big land—

[SIR PETER *laughs aloud*.

Well Peter ! well !

What makes you laugh ?

SIR PETER.

Hearing you sweat to prove
 All this I know so well ; but you have read
 The siege of Troy ?

SIR LAMBERT.

O ! yea, I know it well.

SIR PETER.

There ! they were wrong, as wrong as men
could be ;

For, as I think, they found it such delight
To see fair Helen going through their town :

Yea, any little common thing she did
(As stooping to pick a flower) seem'd so strange,
So new in its great beauty, that they said :

' Here we will keep her living in this town, 199
Till all burns up together.' And so, fought,

In a mad whirl of knowing they were wrong ;

Yea, they fought well, and ever, like a man
That hangs legs off the ground by both his hands,

Over some great height, did they struggle sore,
Quite sure to slip at last ; wherefore, take note

How almost all men, reading that sad siege,
Hold for the Trojans ; as I did at least,

Thought Hector the best knight a long way :

Now

Why should I not do this thing that I think,
For even when I come to count the gains, 210
I have them my side ; men will talk, you know,
(We talk of Hector, dead so long ago,)

When I am dead, of how this Peter clung
To what he thought the right ; of how he died,
Perchance, at last, doing some desperate deed
Few men would care do now, and this is gain
To me, as ease and money is to you,

Moreover, too, I like the straining game
Of striving well to hold up things that fall ;
So one becomes great ; see you ! in good times
All men live well together, and you, too, 221
Live dull and happy—happy ? not so quick,
Suppose sharp thoughts begin to burn you up.

Why then, but just to fight as I do now,

A halter round my neck, would be great bliss.
 O ! I am well off. [*Aside.*]
Talk, and talk, and talk,
 I know this man has come to murder me,
 And yet I talk still.

SIR LAMBERT.

If your side were right,
 You might be, though you lost ; but if I said,
 ‘ You are a traitor, being, as you are, 230
 Born Frenchman.’ What are Edwards unto you,
 Or Richards ?

SIR PETER.

Nay, hold there, my Lambert, hold !
 For fear your zeal should bring you to some
harm,
 Don’t call me traitor.

SIR LAMBERT.

Furthermore, my knight,
 Men call you slippery on your losing side,
 When at Bordeaux I was ambassador,
 I heard them say so, and could scarce say ‘ Nay.’
[*He takes hold of something in his*
sleeve, and rises.]

SIR PETER (*rising*).

They lied—and you lie, not for the first time.
 What have you got there, fumbling up your
sleeve,
 A stolen purse ?

52 SIR PETER HARPDON'S END

SIR LAMBERT.

Nay, liar in your teeth ! 240
Dead liar too ; St. Dennis and St. Lambert !
[*Strikes at Sir Peter with a dagger.*]

SIR PETER (*striking him flatlings with his axe*).
How thief ! thief ! thief ! so there, fair thief,
so there,
St. George Guienne ! glaives for the castellan !
You French, you are but dead, unless you lay
Your spears upon the earth. St. George Guienne !
Well done, John Curzon, how he has them now.

In the Castle.

JOHN CURZON.

What shall we do with all these prisoners, sir ?

SIR PETER.

Why put them all to ransom, those that can
Pay anything, but not too light though, John,
Seeing we have them on the hip : for those
That have no money, that being certified, 251
Why turn them out of doors before they spy ;
But bring Sir Lambert guarded unto me.

JOHN CURZON.

I will, fair sir.

[*He goes.*]

SIR PETER.

I do not wish to kill him,
Although I think I ought ; he shall go mark'd,
By all the saints, though !

Enter Lambert (guarded).

Now, Sir Lambert, now !
What sort of death do you expect to get,
Being taken this way ?

SIR LAMBERT.

Cousin ! cousin ! think !
I am your own blood ; may God pardon me !
I am not fit to die ; if you knew all, 260
All I have done since I was young and good.
O ! you would give me yet another chance,
As God would, that I might wash all clear out,
By serving you and Him. Let me go now !
And I will pay you down more golden crowns
Of ransom than the king would !

SIR PETER.

Well, stand back,
And do not touch me ! No, you shall not die,
Nor yet pay ransom. You, John Curzon, cause
Some carpenters to build a scaffold, high, 269
Outside the gate ; when it is built, sound out
To all good folks, 'Come, see a traitor punish'd !'
Take me my knight, and set him up thereon,
And let the hangman shave his head quite clean,
And cut his ears off close up to the head ;
And cause the minstrels all the while to play
Soft music, and good singing ; for this day
Is my high day of triumph ; is it not,
Sir Lambert ?

SIR LAMBERT.

Ah ! on your own blood, 278
Own name, you heap this foul disgrace ? you dare,
With hands and fame thus sullied, to go back
And take the Lady Alice—

SIR PETER.

Say her name
 Again, and you are dead, slain here by me.
 Why should I talk with you, I'm master here,
 And do not want your schooling; is it not
 My mercy that you are not dangling dead
 There in the gateway with a broken neck?

SIR LAMBERT.

Such mercy! why not kill me then outright?
 To die is nothing; but to live that all
 May point their fingers! yea, I'd rather die.

JOHN CURZON.

Why, will it make you any uglier man 290
 To lose your ears? they're much too big for you,
 You ugly Judas!

SIR PETER.

Hold, John! [*To Lambert.*]

That's your choice,
 To die, mind! Then you shall die—Lambert mine,
 I thank you now for choosing this so well,
 It saves me much perplexity and doubt;
 Perchance an ill deed too, for half I count
 This sparing traitors is an ill deed.

Well,
 Lambert, die bravely, and we're almost friends.

SIR LAMBERT, *grovelling*.

O God! this is a fiend and not a man;
 Will some one save me from him? help, help,
 help!
 I will not die. 300

SIR PETER.

Why, what is this I see ?
A man who is a knight, and banded words
So well just now with me, is lying down,
Gone mad for fear like this ! So, so, you thought
You knew the worst, and might say what you
pleased.

I should have guess'd this from a man like you.
Eh ! righteous Job would give up skin for skin,
Yea, all a man can have for simple life,
And we talk fine, yea, even a hound like this,
Who needs must know that when he dies, deep hell
Will hold him fast for ever—so fine we talk, 311
'Would rather die'—all that. Now sir, get up !
And choose again : shall it be head sans ears,
Or trunk sans head ?

John Curzon, pull him up !
What, life then ? go and build the scaffold, John.

Lambert. I hope that never on this earth
We meet again ; that you'll turn out a monk,
And mend the life I give you, so, farewell,
I'm sorry you're a rascal. John, despatch.

In the French camp before the Castle.

Sir Peter prisoner, Guesclin, Clisson, Sir Lambert.

SIR PETER.

So now is come the ending of my life ; 320
If I could clear this sickening lump away
That sticks in my dry throat, and say a word,
Guesclin might listen.

GUESCLIN.

Tell me, fair sir knight,
 If you have been clean liver before God,
 And then you need not fear much ; as for me,
 I cannot say I hate you, yet my oath,
 And cousin Lambert's ears here clench the thing.

SIR PETER.

I knew you could not hate me, therefore I
 Am bold to pray for life ; 'twill harm your cause
 To hang knights of good name, harm here in
 France

330

I have small doubt, at any rate hereafter
 Men will remember you another way
 Than I should care to be remember'd, ah !
 Although hot lead runs through me for my blood,
 All this falls cold as though I said, 'Sweet lords,
 Give back my falcon !'

See how young I am,
 Do you care altogether more for France,
 Say rather one French faction, than for all
 The state of Christendom ? a gallant knight,
 As (yea, by God !) I have been, is more worth
 Than many castles ; will you bring this death,
 For a mere act of justice, on my head ?

342

Think how it ends all, death ! all other things
 Can somehow be retrieved, yea, send me forth
 Naked and maimed, rather than slay me here ;
 Then somehow will I get me other clothes,
 And somehow will I get me some poor horse,
 And, somehow clad in poor old rusty arms,
 Will ride and smite among the serried glaives,
 Fear not death so ; for I can tilt right well,
 Let me not say 'I could' ; I know all tricks,

That sway the sharp sword cunningly ; ah you,
 You, my Lord Clisson, in the other days 353
 Have seen me learning these, yea, call to mind,
 How in the trodden corn by Chartrés town,
 When you were nearly swooning from the back
 Of your black horse, those three blades slid at
 once
 From off my sword's edge ; pray for me, my lord !

CLISSON.

Nay, this is pitiful, to see him die.
 My Lord the Constable, I pray you note 360
 That you are losing some few thousand crowns
 By slaying this man ; also think ; his lands
 Along the Garonne river lie for leagues,
 And are right rich, a many mills he has,
 Three abbeys of grey monks do hold of him,
 Though wishing well for Clement, as we do ;
 I know the next heir, his old uncle, well,
 Who does not care two deniers for the knight
 As things go now, but slay him, and then see,
 How he will bristle up like any perch, 370
 With curves of spears. What ! do not doubt,
 my lord,
 You'll get the money, this man saved my life,
 And I will buy him for two thousand crowns ;
 Well, five then—eh ! what ! 'No' again ? well then,
 Ten thousand crowns ?

GUESCLIN.

My sweet lord, much I grieve
 I cannot please you, yea, good sooth, I grieve
 This knight must die, as verily he must ;
 For I have sworn it, so men take him out,
 Use him not roughly.

60 SIR PETER HARPDON'S END

While I—St. Dennis ! though, I think you'll
faint,

Your lips are grey so ; yes, you will, unless
You let it out and weep like a hurt child ;
Hurrah ! you do now. Do not go just yet,
For I am Alice, am right like her now ;
Will you not kiss me on the lips, my love ?—

CLISSON.

You filthy beast, stand back and let him go,
Or by God's eyes I'll choke you.

[*Kneeling to Sir Peter.*

Fair sir knight,

I kneel upon my knees and pray to you 449
That you would pardon me for this your death ;
God knows how much I wish you still alive,
Also how heartily I strove to save
Your life at this time ; yea, he knows quite well,
(I swear it, so forgive me !) how I would,
If it were possible, give up my life
Upon this grass for yours ; fair knight, although,
He knowing all things knows this thing too, well,
Yet when you see his face some short time hence
Tell him I tried to save you.

SIR PETER.

O ! my lord,

I cannot say this is as good as life, 460
But yet it makes me feel far happier now,
And if at all, after a thousand years,
I see God's face, I will speak loud and bold,
And tell Him you were kind, and like Himself ;
Sir, may God bless you !

Did you note how I
Fell weeping just now ? pray you, do not think

That Lambert's taunts did this, I hardly heard
The base things that he said, being deep in
thought

Of all things that have happen'd since I was
A little child ; and so at last I thought 470
Of my true lady : truly, sir, it seem'd
No longer gone than yesterday, that this
Was the sole reason God let me be born
Twenty-five years ago, that I might love
Her, my sweet lady, and be loved by her ;
This seem'd so yesterday, to-day death comes,
And is so bitter strong, I cannot see
Why I was born.

But as a last request, 478
I pray you, O kind Clisson, send some man,
Some good man, mind you, to say how I died,
And take my last love to her : fare-you-well,
And may God keep you ; I must go now, lest
I grow too sick with thinking on these things ;
Likewise my feet are wearied of the earth,
From whence I shall be lifted upright soon.

[*As he goes.*]

Ah me ! shamed too, I wept at fear of death ;
And yet not so, I only wept because
There was no beautiful lady to kiss me
Before I died, and sweetly wish good speed
From her dear lips. O for some lady, though
I saw her ne'er before ; Alice, my love, 491
I do not ask for ; Clisson was right kind,
If he had been a woman, I should die
Without this sickness : but I am all wrong,
So wrong and hopelessly afraid to die.
There, I will go.

My God ! how sick I am,
If only she could come and kiss me now.

The Hotel de la Barde, Bordeaux.
The LADY ALICE DE LA BARDE looking out of
a window into the street.

No news yet ! surely, still he holds his own ;
 That garde stands well ; I mind me passing it
 Some months ago ; God grant the walls are
 strong ! 500

I heard some knights say something yestereve,
 I tried hard to forget : words far apart
 Struck on my heart ; something like this ; one
 said,

‘ What eh ! a Gascon with an English name,
 Harpdon ? ’ then nought, but afterwards,
 ‘ Poictou.’

As one who answers to a question ask’d ;
 Then carelessly regretful came, ‘ No, no.’
 Whereto in answer loud and eagerly,
 One said, ‘ Impossible ? Christ, what foul play ! ’
 And went off angrily ; and while thenceforth
 I hurried gaspingly afraid, I heard, 511
 ‘ Guesclin ; ’ ‘ Five thousand men-at-arms ; ’
 ‘ Clisson.’

My heart misgives me it is all in vain
 I send these succours ; and in good time there !
 Their trumpet sounds, ah ! here they are ; good
 knights,
 God up in Heaven keep you.

If they come

And find him prisoner—for I can’t believe
 Guesclin will slay him, even though they storm—
 (The last horse turns the corner.)

God in Heaven !

What have I got to thinking of at last ! 520
 That thief I will not name is with Guesclin,

Who loves him for his lands. My love ! my
love !

O, if I lose you after all the past,
What shall I do ?

I cannot bear the noise
And light street out there, with this thought
alive,

Like any curling snake within my brain ;
Let me just hide my head within these soft
Deep cushions, there to try and think it out.

[Lying in the window-seat.]

I cannot hear much noise now, and I think
That I shall go to sleep : it all sounds dim 530
And faint, and I shall soon forget most things ;
Yea, almost that I am alive and here ;
It goes slow, comes slow, like a big mill-wheel
On some broad stream, with long green weeds
a-sway,

And soft and slow it rises and it falls,
Still going onward.

Lying so, one kiss,
And I should be in Avalon asleep,
Among the poppies, and the yellow flowers ;
And they should brush my cheek, my hair being
spread 539

Far out among the stems ; soft mice and small
Eating and creeping all about my feet,
Red shod and tired ; and the flies should come
Creeping o'er my broad eyelids unafraid ;
And there should be a noise of water going,
Clear blue, fresh water breaking on the slates,
Likewise the flies should creep—God's eyes !
God help,

A trumpet ? I will run fast, leap adown
The slippery sea-stairs, where the crabs fight.

64 SIR PETER HARPDON'S END

Ah !

I was half dreaming, but the trumpet's true,
 He stops here at our house. The Clisson
 arms ? 550
 Ah, now for news. But I must hold my heart,
 And be quite gentle till he is gone out ;
 And afterwards,—but he is still alive,
 He must be still alive.

Enter a Squire of Clisson's.

Good day, fair sir,
 I give you welcome, knowing whence you come.

SQUIRE.

My Lady Alice de la Barde, I come
 - From Oliver Clisson, knight and mighty lord,
 Bringing you tidings : I make bold to hope
 You will not count me villain, even if
 They wring your heart ; nor hold me still in
 hate. 560
 For I am but a mouthpiece after all,
 A mouthpiece, too, of one who wishes well
 To you and your's.

ALICE.

Can you talk faster, sir,
 Get over all this quicker ? fix your eyes
 On mine, I pray you, and whate'er you see,
 Still go on talking fast, unless I fall,
 Or bid you stop.

SQUIRE.

I pray your pardon then,
 And, looking in your eyes, fair lady, say
 I am unhappy that your knight is dead. 569

Take heart, and listen ! let me tell you all.
 We were five thousand goodly men-at-arms,
 And scant five hundred had he in that hold ;
 His rotten sand-stone walls were wet with rain,
 And fell in lumps wherever a stone hit ;
 Yet for three days about the barrier there
 The deadly glaives were gather'd, laid across,
 And push'd and pull'd ; the fourth our engines
 came ;
 But still amid the crash of falling walls,
 And roar of lombards, rattle of hard bolts,
 The steady bow-strings flash'd, and still
 stream'd out 580
 St. George's banner, and the seven swords,
 And still they cried, ' St. George Guienne,' until
 Their walls were flat as Jericho's of old,
 And our rush came, and cut them from the
 keep.

ALICE.

Stop, sir, and tell me if you slew him then,
 And where he died, if you can really mean
 That Peter Harpdon, the good knight, is dead ?

SQUIRE.

Fair lady, in the base-court——

ALICE.

What base-court ?

What do you talk of ? Nay, go on, go on ;
 * 'Twas only something gone within my head :
 Do you not know, one turns one's head round
 quick, 591
 And something cracks there with sore pain ?
 go on,
 And still look at my eyes.

Nor yet as one that plays at japes with God:
 Few words he spoke; not so much what he said
 Moved us, I think, as, saying it, there played
 Strange tenderness from that big soldier there
 About his pleading; eagerness to live
 Because folk loved him, and he loved them back,
 And many gallant plans unfinish'd now
 For ever. Clisson's heart, which may God bless!
 Was moved to pray for him, but all in vain;
 Wherefore I bring this message:

That he waits,

Still loving you, within the little church 650
 Whose windows, with the one eye of the light
 Over the altar, every night behold
 The great dim broken walls he strove to keep!
 There my Lord Clisson did his burial well.
 Now, lady, I will go; God give you rest!

ALICE.

Thank Clisson from me, squire, and farewell!
 And now to keep myself from going mad.
 Christ! I have been a many times to church,
 And, ever since my mother taught me prayers,
 Have used them daily, but to-day I wish 660
 To pray another way; come face to face,
 O Christ, that I may clasp your knees and pray,
 I know not what, at any rate come now
 From one of many places where you are;
 Either in Heaven amid thick angel wings,
 Or sitting on the altar strange with gems,
 Or high up in the dustiness of the apse;
 Let us go, You and I, a long way off,
 To the little damp, dark, Poitevin church;
 While you sit on the coffin in the dark, 670
 Will I lie down, my face on the bare stone

Between your feet, and chatter anything
 I have heard long ago, what matters it
 So I may keep you there, your solemn face
 And long hair even-flowing on each side,
 Until you love me well enough to speak,
 And give me comfort; yea, till o'er your chin,
 And cloven red beard the great tears roll down
 In pity for my misery, and I die,
 Kissed over by you.

Eh Guesclin ! if I were
 Like Countess Mountfort now, that kiss'd the
 knight, 681

Across the salt sea come to fight for her;
 Ah ! just to go about with many knights,
 Wherever you went, and somehow on one day,
 In a thick wood to catch you off your guard,
 Let you find, you and your some fifty friends,
 Nothing but arrows wheresoe'er you turn'd,
 Yea, and red crosses, great spears over them ;
 And so, between a lane of my true men,
 To walk up pale and stern and tall, and with
 My arms on my surcoat, and his therewith,
 And then to make you kneel, O knight Guesclin ;
 And then—alas ! alas ! when all is said, 693
 What could I do but let you go again,
 Being pitiful woman ? I get no revenge,
 Whatever happens ; and I get no comfort,
 I am but weak, and cannot move my feet,
 But as men bid me.

Strange I do not die.
 Suppose this had not happen'd after all ;
 I will lean out again and watch for news.
 I wonder how long I can still feel thus,
 As though I watch'd for news, feel as I did
 Just half-an-hour ago, before this news -

How all the street is humming, some men sing,
 And some men talk ; some look up at the house,
 Then lay their heads together and look grave ;
 Their laughter pains me sorely in the heart,
 Their thoughtful talking makes my head turn
 round,

Yea, some men sing, what is it then they sing ?
 Eh Launcelot, and love and fate and death ;
 They ought to sing of him who was as wight
 As Launcelot or Wade, and yet avail'd 712
 Just nothing, but to fail and fail and fail,
 And so at last to die and leave me here,
 Alone and wretched ; yea, perhaps they will,
 When many years are past, make songs of us ;
 God help me, though, truly I never thought
 That I should make a story in this way,
 A story that his eyes can never see.

[*One sings from outside.*]

Therefore be it believed 720
Whatsoever he grieved,
Whan his horse was relieved,
This Launcelot,
Beat down on his knee,
Right valiant was he
God's body to see,
Though he saw it not.

Right valiant to move,
But for his sad love
The high God above 730
Stinted his praise.

Yet so he was glad
That his son Lord Galahad
That high joyaunce had
All his life-days.

*Sing we therefore then
 Launcelot's praise again,
 For he wan crownés ten,
 If he wan not twelve.*

*To his death from his birth 740
 He was muckle of worth,
 Lay him in the cold earth,
 A long grave ye may delve.*

*Omnes homines benedicite !
 This last fitte ye may see,
 All men pray for me,
 Who made this history
 Cunning and fairly. 748*

RAPUNZEL

THE PRINCE, *being in the wood near the tower,
 in the evening.*

I COULD not even think
 What made me weep that day
 When out of the council-hall
 The courtiers pass'd away,—

THE WITCH.
 Rapunzel, Rapunzel,
 Let down your hair !

RAPUNZEL.
 Is it not true that every day
 She climbeth up the same strange way,
 Her scarlet cloak spread broad and gay,
 Over my golden hair ?

RAPUNZEL

THE PRINCE.

And left me there alone,
To think on what they said ;
'Thou art a king's own son,
'Tis fit that thou should'st wed.'

THE WITCH.

Rapunzel, Rapunzel,
Let down your hair !

RAPUNZEL.

When I undo the knotted mass,
Fathoms below the shadows pass
Over my hair along the grass.
O my golden hair !

20

THE PRINCE.

I put my armour on,
Thinking on what they said ;
'Thou art a king's own son,
'Tis fit that thou should'st wed.'

THE WITCH.

Rapunzel, Rapunzel,
Let down your hair !

RAPUNZEL.

See on the marble parapet
I lean my brow, strive to forget
That fathoms below my hair grows wet
With the dew, my golden hair. 30

THE PRINCE.

I rode throughout the town,
Men did not bow the head,
Though I was the king's own son ;
'He rides to dream,' they said.

THE WITCH.

Rapunzel, Rapunzel,
Wind up your hair !

RAPUNZEL.

See, on the marble parapet
The faint red stains with tears are wet ;
The long years pass, no help comes yet
To free my golden hair. 40

THE PRINCE.

For leagues and leagues I rode,
Till hot my armour grew,
Till underneath the leaves
I felt the evening dew.

THE WITCH.

Rapunzel, Rapunzel,
Weep through your hair !

RAPUNZEL.

And yet—but I am growing old,
For want of love my heart is cold,
Years pass, the while I loose and fold
The fathoms of my hair. 50

THE PRINCE, *in the morning.*

I have heard tales of men, who in the night
Saw paths of stars let down to earth from
heaven,
Who follow'd them until they reach'd the light
Wherein they dwell, whose sins are all for-
given ;

But who went backward when they saw the gate
Of diamond, nor dared to enter in ;
All their life long they were content to wait,
Purging them patiently of every sin.

I must have had a dream of some such thing,
And now am just awaking from that dream ;
For even in grey dawn those strange words ring
Through heart and brain, and still I see that
gleam. 62

For in my dream at sunset-time I lay
Beneath these beeches, mail and helmet off,
Right full of joy that I had come away
From court ; for I was patient of the scoff

That met me always there from day to day,
From any knave or coward of them all ;
I was content to live that wretched way ;
For truly till I left the council-hall, 70

And rode forth arm'd beneath the burning sun,
My gleams of happiness were faint and few,
But then I saw my real life had begun,
And that I should be strong quite well I knew.

For I was riding out to look for love,
Therefore the birds within the thickets sung,
Even in hot noontide, as I pass'd, above
The elms o'ersway'd with longing towards
me hung.

Now some few fathoms from the place where I
Lay in the beech-wood, was a tower fair,
The marble corners faint against the sky : 81
And dreamily I wonder'd what lived there :

Because it seem'd a dwelling for a queen,
No belfry for the swinging of great bells ;
No bolt or stone had ever crush'd the green
Shafts, amber and rose walls, no soot that
tells

Of the Norse torches burning up the roofs,
On the flower-carven marble could I see
But rather on all sides I saw the proofs
Of a great loneliness that sicken'd me ; 90

Making me feel a doubt that was not fear,
Whether my whole life long had been a dream,
And I should wake up soon in some place, where
The piled-up arms of the fighting angels
gleam ;

Not born as yet, but going to be born,
No naked baby as I was at first,
But an armèd knight, whom fire, hate and scorn
Could turn from nothing : my heart almost
burst

Beneath the beeches, as I lay a-dreaming, 99
I tried so hard to read this riddle through,
To catch some golden cord that I saw gleaming
Like gossamer against the autumn blue.

But while I ponder'd these things, from the
wood
There came a black-hair'd woman, tall and
bold,
Who strode straight up to where the tower
stood,
And cried out shrilly words, whereon behold—

THE WITCH, *from the tower.*

Rapunzel, Rapunzel,
Let down your hair !

THE PRINCE.

Ah Christ ! it was no dream then, but ther
stood

(She comes again) a maiden passing fair,
Against the roof, with face turn'd to the wood
Bearing within her arms waves of her yellow
hair.

11:

I read my riddle when I saw her stand,
Poor love ! her face quite pale against her
hair,
Praying to all the leagues of empty land
To save her from the woe she suffer'd there.

To think ! they trod upon her golden hair
In the witches' sabbaths ; it was a delight
For these foul things, while she, with thin feet
bare,
Stood on the roof upon the winter night,

To plait her dear hair into many plaits, 121
And then, while God's eye look'd upon the
thing,
In the very likenesses of Devil's bats,
Upon the ends of her long hair to swing.

And now she stood above the parapet,
And, spreading out her arms, let her hair flow,
Beneath that veil her smooth white forehead set
Upon the marble, more I do not know ;

Because before my eyes a film of gold 129
Floated, as now it floats. O unknown love,
Would that I could thy yellow stair behold,
If still thou standest with lead roof above !

THE WITCH, *as she passes.*
Is there any who will dare
To climb up the yellow stair,
Glorious Rapunzel's golden hair ?

THE PRINCE.
If it would please God make you sing again,
I think that I might very sweetly die,
My soul somehow reach heaven in joyous pain,
My heavy body on the beech-nuts lie. 139

Now I remember ; what a most strange yeai,
Most strange and awful, in the beechen wood
I have pass'd now ; I still have a faint fear
It is a kind of dream not understood.

I have seen no one in this wood except
The witch and her ; have heard no human
tones,
But when the witches' revelry has crept
Between the very jointing of my bones.

Ah ! I know now ; I could not go away,
But needs must stop to hear her sing that song
She always sings at dawning of the day. 150
I am not happy here, for I am strong,

And every morning do I whet my sword,
Yet Rapunzel still weeps within the tower,
And still God ties me down to the green sward,
Because I cannot see the gold stair floating
lower.

RAPUNZEL *sings from the tower.*
My mother taught me prayers
To say when I had need ;
I have so many cares,
That I can take no heed
Of many words in them ; 160
But I remember this :
Christ, bring me to thy bliss.
Mary, maid withouten wem,
Keep me ! I am lone, I wis,
Yet besides I have made this
By myself : *Give me a kiss,*
Dear God, dwelling up in heaven !
Also : *Send me a true knight,*
Lord Christ, with a steel sword, bright,
Broad, and trenchant ; yea, and seven
Spans from hilt to point, O Lord ! 171
And let the handle of his sword
Be gold on silver, Lord in heaven !
Such a sword as I see gleam
Sometimes, when they let me dream.

Yea, besides, I have made this :
Lord, give Mary a dear kiss,
And let gold Michael, who look'd down,
When I was there, on Rouen town
From the spire, bring me that kiss 180
On a lily ! Lord, do this !

These prayers on the dreadful nights,
When the witches plait my hair,
And the fearfulest of sights
On the earth and in the air,
Will not let me close my eyes,
I murmur often, mix'd with sighs,

That my weak heart will not hold
At some things that I behold.
Nay, not sighs, but quiet groans, 190
That swell out the little bones
Of my bosom ; till a trance
God sends in middle of that dance,
And I behold the countenance
Of Michael, and can feel no more
The bitter east wind biting sore
My naked feet ; can see no more
The crayfish on the leaden floor,
That mock with feeler and grim claw.

Yea, often in that happy trance, 200
Beside the blessed countenance
Of golden Michael, on the spire
Glowing all crimson in the fire
Of sunset, I behold a face,
Which sometime, if God give me grace,
May kiss me in this very place.

Evening in the tower.

RAPUNZEL.

It grows half way between the dark and light ;
Love, we have been six hours here alone,
I fear that she will come before the night,
And if she finds us thus we are undone. 210

THE PRINCE.

Nay, draw a little nearer, that your breath
May touch my lips, let my cheek feel your
arm ;
Now tell me, did you ever see a death,
Or ever see a man take mortal harm ?

RAPUNZEL.

Once came two knights and fought with swords
below,

And while they fought I scarce could look at
all,

My head swam so, after a moaning low

Drew my eyes down ; I saw against the wall

One knight lean dead, bleeding from head and
breast,

Yet seem'd it like a line of poppies red 220

In the golden twilight, as he took his rest,

In the dusky time he scarcely seemed dead.

But the other, on his face six paces off,

Lay moaning, and the old familiar name

He mutter'd through the grass, seem'd like a
scoff

Of some lost soul remembering his past fame.

His helm all dented lay beside him there,

The visor-bars were twisted towards the face,

The crest, which was a lady very fair,

Wrought wonderfully, was shifted from its
place. 230

The shower'd mail-rings on the speed-walk lay,

Perhaps my eyes were dazzled with the light

That blazed in the west, yet surely on that day

Some crimson thing had changed the grass
from bright

Pure green I love so. But the knight who died

Lay there for days after the other went ;

Until one day I heard a voice that cried,

' Fair knight, I see Sir Robert we were sent

‘To carry dead or living to the king.’

So the knights came and bore him straight
away 240

On their lance truncheons, such a batter’d thing,
His mother had not known him on that day,
But for his helm-crest, a gold lady fair
Wrought wonderfully.

THE PRINCE.

Ah, they were brothers then,
And often rode together, doubtless where
The swords were thickest, and were loyal men,
Until they fell in these same evil dreams.

RAPUNZEL.

Yea, love ; but shall we not depart from
hence ?
The white moon groweth golden fast, and gleams
Between the aspen stems ; I fear—and yet a
sense 250
Of fluttering victory comes over me,
That will not let me fear aright ; my heart—
Feel how it beats, love, strives to get to thee,
I breathe so fast that my lips needs must part ;
Your breath swims round my mouth, but let
us go.

THE PRINCE.

I, Sebald, also, pluck from off the staff
The crimson banner, let it lie below,
Above it in the wind let grasses laugh.
Now let us go, love, down the winding stair,
With fingers intertwined : ay, feel my sword !
I wrought it long ago, with golden hair 261
Flowing about the hilts, because a word.

Sung by a minstrel old, had set me dreaming
 Of a sweet bow'd-down face with yellow hair,
 Betwixt green leaves I used to see it gleaming,
 A half smile on the lips, though lines of care

Had sunk the cheeks, and made the great eyes
 hollow ;

What other work in all the world had I,
 But through all turns of fate that face to follow ?
 But wars and business kept me there to die.

O child, I should have slain my brother, too,
 My brother, Love, lain moaning in the grass,
 Had I not ridden out to look for you, 273
 When I had watch'd the gilded courtiers pass

From the golden hall. But it is strange your
 name

Is not the same the minstrel sung of yore ;
 You call'd it Rapunzel, 'tis not the name.
 See, love, the stems shine through the open
 door.

Morning in the woods.

RAPUNZEL.

O Love ! me and my unknown name you have
 well won ;

The witch's name was Rapunzel ; eh ! not so
 sweet ? 280

No !—but is this real grass, love, that I tread
 upon ?

What call they these blue flowers that lean
 across my feet ?

THE PRINCE.

Dip down your dear face in the dewy grass,
O love !

And ever let the sweet slim harebells, tenderly
hung,

Kiss both your parted lips ; and I will hang
above,

And try to sing that song the dreamy harper
sung.

He sings.

'Twixt the sunlight and the shade
Float up memories of my maid,
God, remember Guendolen !

Gold or gems she did not wear, 290
But her yellow rippled hair,
Like a veil, hid Guendolen !

'Twixt the sunlight and the shade,
My rough hands so strangely made,
Folded Golden Guendolen ;

Hands used to grip the sword-hilt hard,
Framed her face, while on the sward
Tears fell down from Guendolen.

Guendolen now speaks no word,
Hands fold round about the sword. 300
Now no more of Guendolen.

Only 'twixt the light and shade
Floating memories of my maid
Make me pray for Guendolen.

GUENDOLEN.

I kiss thee, new-found name ; but I will never
go :

Your hands need never grip the hammer'd
sword again,

But all my golden hair shall ever round you
flow,

Between the light and shade from Golden
Guendolen.

Afterwards, in the Palace.

KING SEBALD.

I took my armour off,

Put on king's robes of gold,

Over her kirtle green

The gold fell fold on fold.

310

THE WITCH, *out of hell.*

Guendolen ! Guendolen !

One lock of hair !

GUENDOLEN.

I am so glad, for every day

He kisses me much the same way

As in the tower ; under the sway

Of all my golden hair.

KING SEBALD.

We rode throughout the town,

A gold crown on my head,

Through all the gold-hung streets,

' Praise God ! ' the people said.

320

THE WITCH.

Guendolen ! Guendolen !

Lend me your hair !

GUENDOLEN.

Verily, I seem like one
Who, when day is almost done,
Through a thick wood meets the sun
That blazes in her hair.

KING SEBALD.

Yea, at the palace gates,
'Praise God!' the great knights said, 330
'For Sebald the high king,
And the lady's golden head.'

THE WITCH.

*Woe is me! Guendolen
Sweeps back her hair.*

GUENDOLEN.

Nothing wretched now, no screams ;
I was unhappy once in dreams,
And even now a harsh voice seems
To hang about my hair.

THE WITCH.

WOE ! THAT ANY MAN COULD DARE
TO CLIMB UP THE YELLOW STAIR, 340
GLORIOUS GUENDOLEN'S GOLDEN HAIR.

CONCERNING GEFFRAY TESTE NOIRE

AND if you meet the Canon of Chimay,
As going to Ortaise you well may do,
Greet him from John of Castel Neuf, and say,
All that I tell you, for all this is true.

This Geffray Teste Noire was a Gascon thief,
Who, under shadow of the English name,
Pilled all such towns and countries as were lief
To King Charles and St. Dennis ; thought it
blame

If anything escaped him ; so my lord,
The Duke of Berry, sent Sir John Bonne
Lance, 10
And other knights, good players with the sword,
To check this thief, and give the land a chance.

Therefore we set our bastides round the tower
That Geffray held, the strong thief ! like a
king,

High perch'd upon the rock of Ventadour,
-- Hopelessly strong by Christ ! it was mid
spring,

When first I joined the little army there
With ten good spears ; Auvergne is hot, each
day

We sweated armed before the barrier,
Good feats of arms were done there often—
eh ? 20

Your brother was slain there ? I mind me now,
A right good man-at-arms, God pardon him !
I think 'twas Geffray smote him on the brow
With some spiked axe, and while he totter'd,
dim

About the eyes, the spear of Alleyne Roux
Slipped through his camaille and his throat ;
well, well !

Alleyne is paid now ; your name Alleyne too ?
Mary ! how strange—but this tale I would
tell— 28

For spite of all our bastides, damned Blackhead
 Would ride abroad whene'er he chose to ride,
 We could not stop him ; many a burgher bled
 Dear gold all round his girdle ; far and wide

The villaynes dwelt in utter misery

'Twixt us and thief Sir Geffray ; hauled this
 way

By Sir Bonne Lance at one time, he gone by,
 Down comes this Teste Noire on another day.

And therefore they dig up the stone, grind corn,
 Hew wood, draw water, yea, they lived, in
 short.

As I said just now, utterly forlorn.

Till this our knave and blackhead was out-
 fought. 40

So Bonne Lance fretted, thinking of some trap
 Day after day, till on a time he said ;

' John of Newcastle, if we have good hap,
 We catch our thief in two days.' ' How ? '
 I said.

' Why, Sir, to-day he rideth out again,
 Hoping to take well certain sumpter mules
 From Carcassonne, going with little train,
 Because, forsooth, he thinketh us mere fools ;

' But if we set an ambush in some wood,
 He is but dead ; so, Sir, take thirty spears
 To Verville forest, if it seem you good.' 51
 Then felt I like the horse in Job, who hears

The dancing trumpet sound, and we went forth ;
 And my red lion on the spear-head flapped,
 As faster than the cool wind we rode North,
 Towards the wood of Verville ; thus it
 happened.

We rode a soft space on that day while spies
Got news about Sir Geffray ; the red wine
Under the road-side bush was clear ; the flies,
The dragon-flies I mind me most, did shine

In brighter arms than ever I put on ; 61
So—' Geffray,' said our spies, ' would pass
that way

Next day at sundown ; ' then he must be won ;
And so we enter'd Verville wood next day,

In the afternoon ; through it the highway runs,
' Twixt copses of green hazel, very thick,
And underneath, with glimmering of suns,
The primroses are happy ; the dews lick

The soft green moss. ' Put cloths about your arms
Lest they should glitter ; surely they will go
In a long thin line, watchful for alarms, 71
With all their carriages of booty, so—

' Lay down my pennon in the grass—Lord God !
What have we lying here ? will they be cold,
I wonder, being so bare, above the sod,
Instead of under ? This was a knight too, fold

' Lying on fold of ancient rusted mail ;
No plate at all, gold rowels to the spurs,
And see the quiet gleam of turquoise pale
Along the ceinture ; but the long time blurs

' Even the tinder of his coat to nought, 81
Except these scraps of leather ; see how white
The skull is, loose within the coif ! He fought
A good fight, maybe, ere he was slain quite.

' No armour on the legs too ; strange in faith—
A little skeleton for a knight though—ah !
This one is bigger, truly without scathe
His enemies escaped not—ribs driven out far,—

' That must have reach'd the heart, I doubt—
how now, 89

What say you, Aldovrand—a woman? why?'

' Under the coif a gold wreath on the brow,
Yea, see the hair not gone to powder, lie,

' Golden, no doubt, once—yea, and very small—
This for a knight; but for a dame, my lord,
These loose-hung bones seem shapely still, and
tall,—

Didst ever see a woman's bones, my lord?'

Often, God help me! I remember when

I was a simple boy, fifteen years old,

The Jacquerie froze up the blood of men 99

With their fell deeds, not fit now to be told:

God help again! we enter'd Beauvais town,

Slaying them fast, whereto I help'd, mere boy

As I was then; we gentles cut them down,

These burners and defilers, with great joy.

Reason for that, too, in the great church there

These fiends had lit a fire, that soon went out,

The church at Beauvais being so great and fair—

My father, who was by me, gave a shout

Between a beast's howl and a woman's scream,

Then, panting, chuckled to me: 'John, look!

look! 110

Count the dames' skeletons!' From some bad
dream

Like a man just awaked, my father shook;

And I, being faint with smelling the burnt bones,

And very hot with fighting down the street,

And sick of such a life, fell down, with groans

My head went weakly nodding to my feet.—

—An arrow had gone through her tender throat,
And her right wrist was broken; then I saw
The reason why she had on that war-coat,
Their story came out clear without a flaw;
For when he knew that they were being waylaid,
He threw it over her, yea, hood and all;
Whereby he was much hack'd, while they were
stay'd 123
By those their murderers; many an one did
fall

Beneath his arm, no doubt, so that he clear'd
Their circle, bore his death-wound out of it;
But as they rode, some archer least afraid
Drew a strong bow, and thereby she was hit.
Still as he rode he knew not she was dead,
Thought her but fainted from her broken wrist,
He bound with his great leathern belt—she bled?
Who knows! he bled too, neither was there
miss'd 132

The beating of her heart, his heart beat well
For both of them, till here, within this wood,
He died scarce sorry; easy this to tell;
After these years the flowers forget their
blood.—

How could it be? never before that day,
However much a soldier I might be,
Could I look on a skeleton and say
I care not for it, shudder not—now see, 140
Over those bones I sat and pored for hours,
And thought, and dream'd, and still I scarce
could see
The small white bones that lay upon the flowers,
But evermore I saw the lady; she

With her dear gentle walking leading in,
 By a chain of silver twined about her wrists,
 Her loving knight, mounted and arm'd to win
 Great honour for her, fighting in the lists.

O most pale face, that brings such joy and sorrow
 Into men's hearts—yea, too, so piercing sharp
 That joy is, that it marcheth nigh to sorrow
 For ever—like an overwinded harp. 152

Your face must hurt me always ; pray you now,
 Doth it not hurt you too ? seemeth some pain
 To hold you always, pain to hold your brow
 So smooth, unwrinkled ever ; yea again,

Your long eyes where the lids seem like to drop,
 Would you not, lady, were they shut fast, feel
 Far merrier ? there so high they will not stop,
 They are most sly to glide forth and to steal
 Into my heart ; *I kiss their soft lids there,*

*And in green gardens scarce can stop my lips
 From wandering on your face, but that your hair
 Falls down and tangles me, back my face slips.*

Or say your mouth—I saw you drink red wine
 Once at a feast ; how slowly it sank in,
 As though you fear'd that some wild fate might
 twine 167

Within that cup, and slay you for a sin.
 And when you talk your lips do arch and move
 In such wise that a language new I know
 Besides their sound ; they quiver, too, with love
 When you are standing silent ; know this, too,
 I saw you kissing once, like a curved sword
 That bites with all its edge, did your lips lie,
 Curled gently, slowly, long time could afford
 For caught-up breathings ; like a dying sigh

They gather'd up their lines and went away,
And still kept twitching with a sort of smile,
As likely to be weeping presently,—
Your hands too—how I watch'd them all the
while! 180

'Cry out St. Peter now,' quoth Aldovrand;
I cried, 'St. Peter,' broke out from the wood
With all my spears; we met them hand to
hand,
And shortly slew them; nathless, by the
rood,

We caught not Blackhead then, or any day;
Months after that he died at last in bed,
From a wound pick'd up at a barrier-fray;
That same year's end a steel bolt in the head,
And much bad living kill'd Teste Noire at last;
John Froissart knoweth he is dead by now,
No doubt, but knoweth not this tale just past;
Perchance then you can tell him what I show.

In my new castle, down beside the Eure, 193
There is a little chapel of squared stone,
Painted inside and out; in green nook pure
There did I lay them, every wearied bone;

And over it they lay, with stone-white hands
Clasped fast together, hair made bright with
gold
This Jaques Picard, known through many lands,
Wrought cunningly; he's dead now—I am
old. 200

A GOOD KNIGHT IN PRISON

SIR GUY, *being in the court of a Pagan castle.*

THIS castle where I dwell, it stands
A long way off from Christian lands,
A long way off my lady's hands,
A long way off the aspen trees,
And murmur of the lime-tree bees. .

But down the Valley of the Rose
My lady often hawking goes,
Heavy of cheer ; oft turns behind,
Leaning towards the western wind,
Because it bringeth to her mind 10
Sad whisperings of happy times,
The face of him who sings these rhymes.

King Guilbert rides beside her there,
Bends low and calls her very fair,
And strives, by pulling down his hair,
To hide from my dear lady's ken
The grisly gash I gave him, when
I cut him down at Camelot ;
However he strives, he hides it not,
That tourney will not be forgot, 20
Besides, it is King Guilbert's lot,
Whatever he says she answers not.

Now tell me, you that are in love,
From the king's son to the wood-dove,
Which is the better, he or I ?

For this king means that I should die
In this lone Pagan castle, where
The flowers droop in the bad air
On the September evening. 29

Look, now I take mine ease and sing,
Counting as but a little thing
The foolish spite of a bad king.

For these vile things that hem me in,
These Pagan beasts who live in sin,
The sickly flowers pale and wan,
The grim blue-bearded castellan,
The stanchions half worn-out with rust,
Whereto their banner vile they trust—
Why, all these things I hold them just
Like dragons in a missal-book, 40
Wherein, whenever we may look,
We see no horror, yea, delight
We have, the colours are so bright ;
Likewise we note the specks of white,
And the great plates of burnish'd gold.

Just so this Pagan castle old,
And everything I can see there,
Sick-pining in the marshland air,
I note ; I will go over now, 49
Like one who paints with knitted brow,
The flowers and all things one by one,
From the snail on the wall to the setting sun.

Four great walls, and a little one
That leads down to the barbican,
Which walls with many spears they man,
When news comes to the castellan
Of Launcelot being in the land.

And as I sit here, close at hand
Four spikes of sad sick sunflowers stand,
The castellan with a long wand
Cuts down their leaves as he goes by,

Ponderingly, with screw'd-up eye,
 And fingers twisted in his beard—
 Nay, was it a knight's shout I heard ?
 I have a hope makes me afeard :
 It cannot be, but if some dream
 Just for a minute made me deem.
 I saw among the flowers there
 My lady's face with long red hair,
 Pale, ivory-colour'd dear face come, 70
 As I was wont to see her some
 Fading September afternoon,
 And kiss me, saying nothing, soon
 To leave me by myself again ;
 Could I get this by longing : vain !

The castellan is gone : I see
 On one broad yellow flower a bee
 Drunk with much honey—
Christ ! again,
 Some distant knight's voice brings me pain,
 I thought I had forgot to feel, 80
 I never heard the blissful steel
 These ten years past ; year after year,
 Through all my hopeless sojourn here,
 No Christian pennon has been near ;
 Laus Deo ! the dragging wind draws on
 Over the marshes, battle won,
 Knights' shouts, and axes hammering,
 Yea, quicker now the dint and ring
 Of flying hoofs ; ah ! castellan, 89
 When they come back count man for man,
 Say whom you miss.

THE PAGANS, *from the battlements.*

Mahound to aid !
 Why flee ye so like men dismay'd ?

—36 A GOOD KNIGHT IN PRISON

THE PAGANS, *from without.*
Nay, haste ! for here is Launcelot,
Who follows quick upon us, hot
And shouting with his men-at-arms.

SIR GUY.
Also the Pagans raise alarms,
And ring the bells for fear ; at last
My prison walls will be well past.

SIR LAUNCELOT, *from outside.*
Ho ! in the name of the Trinity,
Let down the drawbridge quick to me, 100
And open doors, that I may see
Guy the good knight.

THE PAGANS, *from the battlements.*
Nay, Launcelot,
With mere big words ye win us not.

SIR LAUNCELOT.
Bid Miles bring up la perriere,
And archers clear the vile walls there,
Bring back the notches to the ear,
Shoot well together ! God to aid !
These miscreants will be well paid.
Hurrah ! all goes together ; Miles
Is good to win my lady's smiles 110
For his good shooting—Launcelot !
On knights a-pace ! this game is hot !

SIR GUY *sayeth afterwards.*
I said, I go to meet her now,
And saying so, I felt a blow
From some clench'd hand across my brow
And fell down on the sunflowers

Just as a hammering smote my ears,
 After which this I felt in sooth ;
 My bare hands throttling without ruth
 The hairy-throated castellan ; 120
 Then a grim fight with those that ran
 To slay me, while I shouted, ' God
 For the Lady Mary ! ' deep I trod
 That evening in my own red blood ;
 Nevertheless so stiff I stood,
 That when the knights burst the old wood
 Of the castle-doors, I was not dead.

I kiss the Lady Mary's head,
 Her lips, and her hair golden red,
 Because to-day we have been wed. 130

OLD LOVE

' You must be very old, Sir Giles,'
 I said ; he said : ' Yea, very old : '
 Whereat the mournfullest of smiles
 Creased his dry skin with many a fold.
 ' They hammer'd out my basnet point
 Into a round salade,' he said,
 ' The basnet being quite out of joint,
 Natheless the salade rasps my head.'
 He gazed at the great fire awhile :
 ' And you are getting old, Sir John ; ' 10
 (He said this with that cunning smile
 That was most sad ;) ' we both wear on,
 ' Knights come to court and look at me,
 With eyebrows up, except my lord,
 And my dear lady, none I see
 That know the ways of my old sword.'

(My lady ! at that word no pang
Stopp'd all my blood.) 'But tell me, John,
Is it quite true that pagans hang
So thick about the east, that on 20

'The eastern sea no Venice flag
Can fly unpaid for ? ' 'True,' I said,
'And in such way the miscreants drag
Christ's cross upon the ground, I dread

'That Constantine must fall this year.'
Within my heart ; 'These things are small ;
This is not small, that things outwear
I thought were made for ever, yea, all,

'All things go soon or late ; ' I said—
I saw the duke in court next day ; 30
Just as before, his grand great head
Above his gold robes dreaming lay,

Only his face was paler ; there
I saw his duchess sit by him ;
And she—she was changed more ; her hair
Before my eyes that used to swim,

And make me dizzy with great bliss
Once, when I used to watch her sit—
Her hair is bright still, yet it is
As though some dust were thrown on it. 40

Her eyes are shallower, as though
Some grey glass were behind ; her brow
And cheeks the straining bones show through,
Are not so good for kissing now

Her lips are drier now she is
A great duke's wife these many years,
They will not shudder with a kiss
As once they did, being moist with tears.

Also her hands have lost that way
 Of clinging that they used to have ; 50
 They look'd quite easy, as they lay
 Upon the silken cushions brave

With broidery of the apples green
 My Lord Duke bears upon his shield.
 Her face, alas ! that I have seen
 Look fresher than an April field,

This is all gone now ; gone also
 Her tender walking ; when she walks
 She is most queenly I well know,
 And she is fair still :—as the stalks 60

Of faded summer-lilies are,
 So is she grown now unto me
 This spring-time, when the flowers star
 The meadows, birds sing wonderfully.

I warrant once she used to cling
 About his neck, and kiss'd him so,
 And then his coming step would ring
 Joy-bells for her,—some time ago.

Ah ! sometimes like an idle dream
 That hinders true life overmuch, 70
 Sometimes like a lost heaven, these seem.
 This love is not so hard to smutch.

THE GILLIFLOWER OF GOLD

A GOLDEN gilliflower to-day
 I wore upon my helm alway,
 And won the prize of this tourney.
Hah ! hañ ! la belle jaune giroflée.

However well Sir Giles might sit,
 His sun was weak to wither it,
 Lord Miles's blood was dew on it :
Hah ! hah ! la belle jaune giroflée.

Although my spear in splinters flew,
 From John's steel-coat my eye was true ; 10
 I wheel'd about, and cried for you,
Hah ! hah ! la belle jaune giroflée.

Yea, do not doubt my heart was good,
 Though my sword flew like rotten wood,
 To shout, although I scarcely stood,
Hah ! hah ! la belle jaune giroflée.

My hand was steady too, to take
 My axe from round my neck, and break
 John's steel-coat up for my love's sake.
Hah ! hah ! la belle jaune giroflée. 20

When I stood in my tent again,
 Arming afresh, I felt a pain
 Take hold of me, I was so fain—
Hah ! hah ! la belle jaune giroflée.

To hear : ' *Honneur aux fils des preux !* '
 Right in my ears again, and shew
 The gilliflower blossom'd new.
Hah ! hah ! la belle jaune giroflée.

The Sieur Guillaume against me came,
 His tabard bore three points of flame 30
 From a red heart : with little blame—
Hah ! hah ! la belle jaune giroflée.

Our tough spears crackled up like straw ;
 He was the first to turn and draw
 His sword, that had nor speck nor flaw,—
Hah ! hah ! la belle jaune giroflée.

THE GILLIFLOWER OF GOLD 101

But I felt weaker than a maid,
And my brain, dizzied and afraid,
Within my helm a fierce tune play'd,—

Hah ! hah ! la belle jaune giroflée. 40

Until I thought of your dear head,
Bow'd to the gilliflower bed,
The yellow flowers stain'd with red ;—

Hah ! hah ! la belle jaune giroflée.

Crash ! how the swords met, ' *giroflée !* '
The fierce tune in my helm would play,
' *La belle ! la belle ! jaune giroflée !* '

Hah ! hah ! la belle jaune giroflée.

Once more the great swords met again,
' *La belle ! la belle !* ' but who fell then ? 50
Le Sieur Guillaume, who struck down ten ;—

Hah ! hah ! la belle jaune giroflée.

And as with mazed and unarm'd face,
Toward my own crown and the Queen's place,
They led me at a gentle pace—

Hah ! hah ! la belle jaune giroflée.

I almost saw your quiet head
Bow'd o'er the gilliflower bed,
The yellow flowers stain'd with red—

Hah ! hah ! la belle jaune giroflée. 60

SHAMEFUL DEATH

THERE were four of us about that bed ;
 The mass-priest knelt at the side,
 I and his mother stood at the head,
 Over his feet lay the bride ;
 We were quite sure that he was dead,
 Though his eyes were open wide.

He did not die in the night,
 He did not die in the day,
 But in the morning twilight
 His spirit pass'd away,

- When neither sun nor moon was bright,
 And the trees were merely grey.

He was not slain with the sword,
 Knight's axe, or the knightly spear,
 Yet spoke he never a word
 After he came in here ;
 I cut away the cord
 From the neck of my brother dear.

He did not strike one blow,
 For the recreants came behind,
 In a place where the hornbeams grow,
 A path right hard to find,
 For the hornbeam boughs swing so,
 That the twilight makes it blind.

They lighted a great torch then,
 When his arms were pinion'd fast,
 Sir John the knight of the Fen,
 Sir Guy of the Dolorous Blast,
 With knights threescore and ten,
 Hung brave Lord Hugh at last.

10

20

30

I am threescore and ten,
And my hair is all turn'd grey,
But I met Sir John of the Fen
Long ago on a summer day,
And am glad to think of the moment when
I took his life away.

I am threescore and ten,
And my strength is mostly pass'd,
But long ago I and my men,
When the sky was overcast, 40
And the smoke roll'd over the reeds of the fen,
Slew Guy of the Dolorous Blast.

And now, knights all of you,
I pray you pray for Sir Hugh,
A good knight and a true,
And for Alice, his wife, pray too.

THE EVE OF CRECY

GOLD on her head, and gold on her feet,
And gold where the hems of her kirtle meet,
And a golden girdle round my sweet ;—
Ah ! qu'elle est belle La Marguerite.

Margaret's maids are fair to see,
Freshly dress'd and pleasantly ;
Margaret's hair falls down to her knee ;—
Ah ! qu'elle est belle La Marguerite.

If I were rich I would kiss her feet,
I would kiss the place where the gold hems
meet, 10
And the golden girdle round my sweet—
Ah ! qu'elle est belle La Marguerite.

Ah me ! I have never touch'd her hand ;
When the arriere-ban goes through the land,
Six basnets under my pennon stand ;—

Ah ! qu'elle est belle La Marguerite.

And many an one grins under his hood :
' Sir Lambert de Bois, with all his men good,
Has neither food nor firewood ;'—

Ah ! qu'elle est belle La Marguerite. 20

If I were rich I would kiss her feet,
And the golden girdle of my sweet,
And thereabouts where the gold hems meet ;—

Ah ! qu'elle est belle La Marguerite.

Yet even now it is good to think,
While my few poor varlets grumble and drink
In my desolate hall, where the fires sink,—

Ah ! qu'elle est belle La Marguerite.

Of Margaret sitting glorious there,
In glory of gold and glory of hair, 30
And glory of glorious face most fair ;—

Ah ! qu'elle est belle La Marguerite.

Likewise to-night I make good cheer,
Because this battle draweth near :
For what have I to lose or fear ?—

Ah ! qu'elle est belle La Marguerite.

For, look you, my horse is good to prance
A right fair measure in this war-dance,
Before the eyes of Philip of France ;—

Ah ! qu'elle est belle La Marguerite. 40

And sometime it may hap, perdie,
While my new towers stand up three and three,
And my hall gets painted fair to see—

Ah ! qu'elle est belle La Marguerite—

That folks may say : ' Times change, by the
rood,

For Lambert, banneret of the wood,
Has heaps of food and firewood,—

Ah ! qu'elle est belle La Marguerite.

' And wonderful eyes, too, under the hood
Of a damsel of right noble blood : '

50

St. Ives, for Lambert of the wood !—

Ah ! qu'elle est belle La Marguerite.

THE JUDGEMENT OF GOD

' SWERVE to the left, son Roger,' he said,

' When you catch his eyes through the helmet-
slit,

Swerve to the left, then out at his head,

And the Lord God give you joy of it !

The blue owls on my father's hood

Were a little dimm'd as I turn'd away ;

This giving up of blood for blood

Will finish here somehow to-day.

So—when I walk'd out from the tent,

Their howling almost blinded me ;

10

Yet for all that I was not bent

By any shame. Hard by, the sea

Made a noise like the aspens where

We did that wrong, but now the place

Is very pleasant, and the air

Blows cool on any passer's face.

And all the wrong is gather'd now

Into the circle of these lists—

Yea, howl out, butchers ! tell me how

His hands were cut off at the wrists ;

20

106 THE JUDGEMENT OF GOD

And how Lord' Roger bore his face

A league above his spear-point, high
Above the owls, to that strong place

Among the waters—yea, yea, cry :

' What a brave champion we have got !

Sir Oliver, the flower of all

The Hainault knights.' The day being hot,

He sat beneath a broad white pall,

White linen over all his steel ;

What a good knight he look'd ! his sword
Laid thwart his knees ; he liked to feel 31
Its steadfast edge clear as his word.

And he look'd solemn ; how his love

Smiled whitely on him, sick with fear !

How all the ladies up above

Twisted their pretty hands ! so near

The fighting was—Ellayne ! Ellayne !

They cannot love like you can, who
Would burn your hands off, if that pain

Could win a kiss—am I not true 40

To you for ever ? therefore I

Do not fear death or anything ;

If I should limp home wounded, why,

While I lay sick you would but sing,

And soothe me into quiet sleep.

If they spat on the recreant knight,
Threw stones at him, and cursed him deep,

Why then—what then ; your hand would light

So gently on his drawn-up face,

And you would kiss him, and in soft 50

Cool scented clothes would lap him, pace

The quiet room and weep oft,—oft

Would turn and smile, and brush his cheek
 With your sweet chin and mouth ; and in
 The order'd garden you would seek
 The biggest roses—any sin.

And these say : ' No more now my knight,
 Or God's knight any longer '—you,
 Being than they so much more white,
 So much more pure and good and true, 60

Will cling to me for ever—there,
 Is not that wrong turn'd right at last
 Through all these years, and I wash'd clean ?
 Say, yea, Ellayne ; the time is past,

Since on that Christmas-day last year
 Up to your feet the fire crept,
 And the smoke through the brown leaves sere
 Blinded your dear eyes that you wept ;

Was it not I that caught you then,
 And kiss'd you on the saddle-bow ? 70
 Did not the blue owl mark the men
 Whose spears stood like the corn a-row ?

This Oliver is a right good knight,
 And must needs beat me, as I fear,
 Unless I catch him in the fight,
 My father's crafty way—John, here !

Bring up the men from the south gate,
 To help me if I fall or win,
 For even if I beat, their hate
 Will grow to more than this mere grin. 80

THE LITTLE TOWER

Up and away through the drifting rain !
 Let us ride to the Little Tower again,

Up and away from the council-board !
 Do on the hauberk, gird on the sword.

The king is blind with gnashing his teeth,
 Change gilded scabbard to leather sheath :

Though our arms are wet with the slanting rain,
 This is joy to ride to my love again :

I laugh in his face when he bids me yield ;

• Who knows one field from the other field, 10

For the grey rain driveth all astray ?—

Which way through the floods, good carle, I pray ?

‘ The left side yet ! the left side yet !

Till your hand strikes on the bridge parapet.’

‘ Yea so : the causeway holdeth good

Under the water ? ’ ‘ Hard as wood ;

Right away to the uplands ; speed, good knight.’
 Seven hours yet before the light.

Shake the wet off on the upland road ;

My taberd has grown a heavy load. 20

What matter ? up and down hill after hill ;

Dead grey night for five hours still.

The hill-road droppeth lower again,

Lower, down to the poplar plain.

No furlong farther for us to-night,

The Little Tower draweth in sight ;

They are ringing the bells, and the torches glare.
Therefore the roofs of wet slate stare.

There she stands, and her yellow hair slantingly
Drifts the same way that the rain goes by. 30

Who will be faithful to us to-day,
With little but hard glaive-strokes for pay ?

The grim king fumes at the council-board :
' Three more days, and then the sword ,

Three more days, and my sword through his
head ;

And above his white brows, pale and dead,

A paper crown on the top of the spire ,
And for her the stake and the witches' fire.'

Therefore though it be long ere day,
Take axe and pick and spade, I pray. 40

Break the dams down all over the plain :
God send us three more days such rain :

Block all the upland roads with trees ;
The Little Tower with no great ease

Is won, I warrant ; bid them bring
Much sheep and oxen, everything

The spits are wont to turn with ; wine
And wheaten bread, that we may dine

In plenty each day of the siege ;
Good friends, ye know me no hard liege ; 50

My lady is right fair, see ye !
Pray God to keep you frank and free.

Love Isabeau, keep goodly cheer ;
The Little Tower will stand well here

Many a year when we are dead,
And over it our green and red,
Barred with the Lady's golden head ;
From mere old age when we are dead.

THE SAILING OF THE SWORD

ACROSS the empty garden-beds,
When the Sword went out to sea;
I scarcely saw my sisters' heads
Bowed each beside a tree.
I could not see the castle leads,
When the Sword went out to sea.

Alicia wore a scarlet gown,
When the Sword went out to sea,
But Ursula's was russet brown :
For the mist we could not see
The scarlet roofs of the good town,
When the Sword went out to sea.

10

Green holly in Alicia's hand,
When the Sword went out to sea ;
With sere oak-leaves did Ursula stand ;
O ! yet alas for me !
I did but bear a peel'd white wand,
When the Sword went out to sea.

O, russet brown and scarlet bright,
When the Sword went out to sea,
My sisters wore ; I wore but white :
Red, brown, and white, are three ;
Three damozels ; each had a knight,
When the Sword went out to sea.

20

Sir Robert shouted loud, and said,

When the Sword went out to sea,
 ' Alicia, while I see thy head,
 What shall I bring for thee ? '
 ' O, my sweet lord, a ruby red : '
The Sword went out to sea.

30

Sir Miles said, while the sails hung down,

When the Sword went out to sea,
 ' Oh, Ursula ! while I see the town,
 What shall I bring for thee ? '
 ' Dear knight, bring back a falcon brown : '
The Sword went out to sea.

But my Roland, no word he said

When the Sword went out to sea,
 But only turn'd away his head,—
 A quick shriek came from me :
 ' Come back, dear lord, to your white maid ; '—
The Sword went out to sea.

40

The hot sun bit the garden-beds,

When the Sword came back from sea ;
 Beneath an apple-tree our heads
 Stretched out toward the sea ;
 Grey gleam'd the thirsty castle-leads,
When the Sword came back from sea.

Lord Robert brought a ruby red,

When the Sword came back from sea ;
 He kissed Alicia on the head :
 ' I am come back to thee ;
 'Tis time, sweet love, that we were wed,
Now the Sword is back from sea ! '

50

112 THE SAILING OF THE SWORD

Sir Miles he bore a falcon brown,
When the Sword came back from sea ;
 His arms went round tall Ursula's gown,—
 ' What joy, O love, but thee ?
 Let us be wed in the good town,
Now the Sword is back from sea ! ' 60

My heart grew sick, no more afraid,
When the Sword came back from sea ;
 Upon the deck a tall white maid
 Sat on Lord Roland's knee ;
 His chin was press'd upon her head,
When the Sword came back from sea !

SPELL-BOUND

How weary is it none can tell,
 How dismally the days go by !
 I hear the tinkling of the bell,
 I see the cross against the sky.
 The year wears round to autumn-tide,
 Yet comes no reaper to the corn ;
 The golden land is like a bride
 When first she knows herself forlorn—
 She sits and weeps with all her hair
 Laid downward over tender hands ; 10
 For stained silk she hath no care,
 No care for broken ivory wands ;
 The silver cups beside her stand ;
 The golden stars on the blue roof
 Yet glitter, though against her hand
 His cold sword presses for a proof

He is not dead, but gone away.

How many hours did she wait
For me, I wonder ? Till the day
Had faded wholly, and the gate

20

Clanged to behind returning knights ?

I wonder did she raise her head
And go away, fleeing the lights ;
And lay the samite on her bed,

The wedding samite strewn with pearls :
Then sit with hands laid on her knees,
Shuddering at half-heard sound of girls
That chatter outside in the breeze ?

I wonder did her poor heart throb
At distant tramp of coming knight ? 30
How often did the choking sob
Raise up her head and lips ? The light,

Did it come on her unawares,
And drag her sterily down before
People who loved her not ? in prayers
Did she say one name and no more ?

And once—all songs they ever sung,
All tales they ever told to me,
This only burden through them rung :
O ! golden love that waitest me,

40

*The days pass on, pass on a pace,
Sometimes I have a little rest
In fairest dreams, when on thy face
My lips lie, or thy hands are prest*

*About my forehead, and thy lips
Draw near and nearer to mine own ;
But when the vision from me slips,
In colourless dawn I lie and moan,*

*And wander forth with fever'd blood,
That makes me start at little things,* 50
*The blackbird screaming from the wood,
The sudden whirr of pheasants' wings.*

*O ! dearest, scarcely seen by me—
But when that wild time had gone by,
And in these arms I folded thee,
Who ever thought those days could die ?*

*Yet now I wait, and you wait too,
For what perchance may never come ;
You think I have forgotten you,
That I grew tired and went home.* 60

*But what if some day as I stood
Against the wall with strained hands,
And turn'd my face toward the wood,
Away from all the golden lands ;*

*And saw you come with tired feet,
And pale face thin and wan with care,
And stained raiment no more neat,
The white dust lying on your hair :—*

*Then I should say, I could not come ;
This land was my wide prison, dear ;* 70
*I could not choose but go ; at home
There is a wizard whom I fear :*

*He bound me round with silken chains
I could not break ; he set me here
Above the golden-waving plains,
Where never reaper cometh near.*

*And you have brought me my good sword,
Wherewith in happy days of old
I won you well from knight and lord ;
My heart upswells and I grow bold.* 80

But I shall die unless you stand,
—Half lying now, you are so weak,—
Within my arms, unless your hand
Pass to and fro across my cheek.

THE WIND

АH! no, no, it is nothing, surely nothing at all,
Only the wild-going wind round by the garden-
wall,

For the dawn just now is breaking, the wind
beginning to fall.

Wind, wind! thou art sad, art thou kind?

Wind, wind, unhappy! thou art blind,

Yet still thou wanderest the lily-seed to find.

So I will sit, and think and think of the days
gone by,

Never moving my chair for fear the dogs
should cry,

Making no noise at all while the flambeau
burns awry.

For my chair is heavy and carved, and with
sweeping green behind 10

It is hung, and the dragons thereon grin out in
the gusts of the wind;

On its folds an orange lies, with a deep gash
cut in the rind.

Wind, wind! thou art sad, art thou kind?

Wind, wind, unhappy! thou art blind,

Yet still thou wanderest the lily-seed to find.

If I move my chair it will scream, and the
orange will roll out far,

And the faint yellow juice ooze out like blood
from a wizard's jar;

And the dogs will howl for those who went last
month to the war.

Wind, wind ! thou art sad, art thou kind ?

Wind, wind, unhappy ! thou art blind, 20

Yet still thou wanderest the lily-seed to find.

So I will sit and think of love that is over and
past,

O ! so long ago—yes, I will be quiet at last ;
Whether I like it or not, a grim half-slumber is
cast

Over my worn old brains, that touches the
roots of my heart,

And above my half-shut eyes the blue roof 'gins
to part,

And show the blue spring sky, till I am ready
to start

From out of the green-hung chair ; but some-
thing keeps me still,

And I fall in a dream that I walk'd with her on
the side of a hill,

Dotted—for was it not spring ?—with tufts of
the daffodil. 30

Wind, wind ! thou art sad, art thou kind ?

Wind, wind, unhappy ! thou art blind,

Yet still thou wanderest the lily-seed to find.

And Margaret as she walk'd held a painted
book in her hand ;

Her finger kept the place ; I caught her, we both
did stand .

Face to face, on the top of the highest hill in
the land !

Wind, wind ! thou art sad, art thou kind ?

Wind, wind, unhappy ! thou art blind,

Yet still thou wanderest the lily-seed to find.

I held to her long bare arms, but she shudder'd
away from me, 40
While the flush went out of her face as her head
fell back on a tree,
And a spasm caught her mouth, fearful for me
to see ;

And still I held to her arms till her shoulder
touch'd my mail,
Weeping she totter'd forward, so glad that I
should prevail,
And her hair went over my robe, like a gold
flag over a sail.

*Wind, wind ! thou art sad, art thou kind ?
Wind, wind, unhappy ! thou art blind,
Yet still thou wanderest the lily-seed to find.*

I kiss'd her hard by the ear, and she kiss'd me
on the brow,
And then lay down on the grass, where the mark
on the moss is now, 50
And spread her arms out wide while I went
down below.

*Wind, wind ! thou art sad, art thou kind ?
Wind, wind, unhappy ! thou art blind,
Yet still thou wanderest the lily-seed to find.*

And then I walk'd for a space to and fro on
the side of the hill,
Till I gather'd and held in my arms great
sheaves of the daffodil,
And when I came again my Margaret lay there
still.

I piled them high and high above her heaving
breast,

How they were caught and held in her loose
ungirded vest !

But one beneath her arm died, happy so to be
prest ! 6c

Wind, wind ! thou art sad, art thou kind ?

Wind, wind, unhappy ! thou art blind,

Yet still thou wanderest the lily-seed to find.

Again I turn'd my back and went away for an
hour ;

She said no word when I came again, so, flower
by flower,

I counted the daffodils over, and cast them
languidly lower.

Wind, wind ! thou art sad, art thou kind ?

Wind, wind, unhappy ! thou art blind,

Yet still thou wanderest the lily-seed to find.

My dry hands shook and shook as the green
gown show'd again, 7c

Clear'd from the yellow flowers, and I grew
hollow with pain,

And on to us both there fell from the sun-
shower drops of rain.

Wind, wind ! thou art sad, art thou kind ?

Wind, wind, unhappy ! thou art blind,

Yet still thou wanderest the lily-seed to find.

Alas ! alas ! there was blood on the very quiet
breast,

Blood lay in the many folds of the loose un-
girded vest,

Blood lay upon her arm where the flower had
been prest.

I shriek'd and leapt from my chair, and the
 orange roll'd out far,
 The faint yellow juice oozed out like blood
 from a wizard's jar ; 80
 And then in march'd the ghosts of those that
 had gone to the war.

I knew them by the arms that I was used to paint
 Upon their long thin shields ; but the colours
 were all grown faint,
 And faint upon their banner was Olaf, king and
 saint.

Wind, wind ! thou art sad, art thou kind ?
Wind, wind, unhappy ! thou art blind, 86
Yet still thou wanderest the lily-seed to find.

THE BLUE CLOSET

THE DAMOZELS.

LADY ALICE, Lady Louise,
 Between the wash of the tumbling seas
 We are ready to sing, if so ye please ;
 So lay your long hands on the keys ;
 Sing, '*Laudate pueri.*'
And ever the great bell overhead
Boom'd in the wind a knell for the dead,
Though no one toll'd it, a knell for the dead.

LADY LOUISE.

Sister, let the measure swell
 Not too loud ; for you sing not well 10
 If you drown the faint boom of the bell ;
 He is weary, so am I.
And ever the chevron overhead
Flapp'd on the banner of the dead ;
(Was he asleep, or was he dead ?)

LADY ALICE.

Alice the Queen, and Louise the Queen,
 Two damozels wearing purple and green,
 Four lone ladies dwelling here
 From day to day and year to year ;
 And there is none to let us go , 20
 To break the locks of the doors below,
 Or shovel away the heaped-up snow ;
 And when we die no man will know
 That we are dead ; but they give us leave,
 Once every year on Christmas-eve,
 To sing in the Closet Blue one song ;
 And we should be so long, so long,
 If we dared, in singing ; for dream on dream,
 They float on in a happy stream ;
 Float from the gold strings, float from the keys,
 Float from the open'd lips of Louise ; 31
 But, alas ! the sea-salt oozes through
 The chinks of the tiles of the Closet Blue ;
And ever the great bell overhead
Booms in the wind a knell for the dead,
The wind plays on it a knell for the dead.

[*They sing all together.*]

How long ago was it, how long ago,
 He came to this tower with hands full of snow ?
 'Kneel down, O love Louise, kneel down,' he said,
 And sprinkled the dusty snow over my head.
 He watch'd the snow melting, it ran through my
 hair, 41
 Ran over my shoulders, white shoulders and bare.
 'I cannot weep for thee, poor love Louise,
 For my tears are all hidden deep under the seas ;

'In a gold and blue casket she keeps all my tears,
But my eyes are no longer blue, as in old years;

'Yea, they grow grey with time, grow small and
dry,
I am so feeble now, would I might die.'

*And in truth the great bell overhead
Left off his pealing for the dead, 50
Perchance, because the wind was dead.*

Will he come back again, or is he dead?
O! is he sleeping, my scarf round his head?

Or did they strangle him as he lay there,
With the long scarlet scarf I used to wear?

Only I pray thee, Lord, let him come here!
Both his soul and his body to me are most dear.

Dear Lord, that loves me, I wait to receive
Either body or spirit this wild Christmas-eve.

*Through the floor shot up a lily red, 60
With a patch of earth from the land of the dead,
For he was strong in the land of the dead.*

What matter that his cheeks were pale,
His kind kiss'd lips all grey?
'O, love Louise, have you waited long?'
'O, my lord Arthur, yea.'

What if his hair that brush'd her cheek
Was stiff with frozen rime?
His eyes were grown quite blue again,
As in the happy time. 70

' O, love Louise, this is the key
Of the happy golden land !
O, sisters, cross the bridge with me,
My eyes are full of sand.
What matter that I cannot see,
If ye take me by the hand ?'

*And ever the great bell overhead,
And the tumbling seas mourn'd for the dead ;
For their song ceased, and they were dead.* 79

THE TUNE OF SEVEN TOWERS

No one goes there now :
For what is left to fetch away
From the desolate battlements all arow,
And the lead roof heavy and grey ?
' Therefore,' said fair Yoland of the flowers,
' This is the tune of Seven Towers.'

No one walks there now ;
Except in the white moonlight
The white ghosts walk in a row ;
If one could see it, an awful sight,— 10
' Listen !' said fair Yoland of the flowers,
' This is the tune of Seven Towers.'

But none can see them now,
Though they sit by the side of the moat,
Feet half in the water, there in a row,
Long hair in the wind afloat.
' Therefore,' said fair Yoland of the flowers,
' This is the tune of Seven Towers.'

THE TUNE OF SEVEN TOWERS 123

If any will go to it now,
He must go to it all alone, 20
Its gates will not open to any row
Of glittering spears—will you go alone?
'Listen!' said fair Yoland of the flowers,
'This is the tune of Seven Towers.'

By my love go there now,
To fetch me my coif away,
My coif and my kirtle, with pearls arow,
Oliver, go to-day!
'Therefore,' said fair Yoland of the flowers,
'This is the tune of Seven Towers.' 30

I am unhappy now,
I cannot tell you why;
If you go, the priests and I in a row
Will pray that you may not die.
'Listen!' said fair Yoland of the flowers,
'This is the tune of Seven Towers.'

If you will go for me now,
I will kiss your mouth at last;
[She sayeth inwardly.]
(The graves stand grey in a row,)
Oliver, hold me fast! 40
'Therefore,' said fair Yoland of the flowers,
'This is the tune of Seven Towers.'

GOLDEN WINGS

MIDWAYS of a walled garden,
In the happy poplar land,
Did an ancient castle stand,
With an old knight for a warden.

Many scarlet bricks there were
In its walls, and old grey stone ;
Over which red apples shone
At the right time of the year.

On the bricks the green moss grew,
Yellow lichen on the stone,
Over which red apples shone ;
Little war that castle knew.

Deep green water fill'd the moat,
Each side had a red-brick lip,
Green and mossy with the drip
Of dew and rain ; there was a boat

Of carven wood, with hangings green
About the stern ; it was great bliss
For lovers to sit there and kiss
In the hot summer noons, not seen.

Across the moat the fresh west wind
In very little ripples went ;
The way the heavy aspens bent
Towards it, was a thing to mind.

The painted drawbridge over it
Went up and down with gilded chains.
'Twas pleasant in the summer rains
Within the bridge-house there to sit.

There were five swans that ne'er did eat
The water-weeds, for ladies came 30
Each day, and young knights did the same,
And gave them cakes and bread for meat.

They had a house of painted wood,
A red roof gold-spiked over it,
Wherein upon their eggs to sit
Week after week ; no drop of blood,
Drawn from men's bodies by sword-blows,
Came ever there, or any tear ;
Most certainly from year to year
'Twas pleasant as a Provence rose. . 40

The banners seem'd quite full of ease,
That over the turret-roofs hung down ;
The battlements could get no frown
From the flower-moulded cornices.

Who walked in that garden there ?
Miles and Giles and Isabeau,
Tall Jehane du Castel beau,
Alice of the golden hair,

Big Sir Gervaise, the good knight,
Fair Ellayne le Violet, 50
Mary, Constance fille de fay,
Many dames with footfall light.

Whosoever wander'd there,
Whether it be dame or knight,
Half of scarlet, half of white
Their raiment was ; of roses fair
Each wore a garland on the head,
At Ladies' Gard the way was so :
Fair Jehane du Castel beau
Wore her wreath till it was dead. 60

Little joy she had of it,
Of the raiment white and red,
Or the garland on her head,
She had none with whom to sit

In the carven boat at noon ;
None the more did Jehane weep,
She would only stand and keep
Saying, ' He will be here soon.'

Many times in the long day
Miles and Giles and Gervaise past,
Holding each some white hand fast,
Every time they heard her say :

70

' Summer cometh to an end,
Undern cometh after noon ;
Golden wings will be here soon,
What if I some token send ? '

Wherefore that night within the hall,
With open mouth and open eyes,
Like some one listening with surprise,
She sat before the sight of all.

80

Stoop'd down a little she sat there,
With neck stretch'd out and chin thrown up,
One hand around a golden cup ;
And strangely with her fingers fair

She beat some tune upon the gold ;
The minstrels in the gallery
Sung : ' Arthur, who will never die,
In Avallon he groweth old.'

And when the song was ended, she
Rose and caught up her gown and ran ;
None stopp'd her eager face and wan
Of all that pleasant company.

90

Right so within her own chamber
Upon her bed she sat ; and drew
Her breath in quick gasps ; till she knew
That no man follow'd after her :

She took the garland from her head,
Loosed all her hair, and let it lie
Upon the coverlit ; thereby
She laid the gown of white and red ; 100

And she took off her scarlet shoon,
And bared her feet ; still more and more
Her sweet face redden'd ; evermore
She murmur'd : ' He will be here soon ;

' Truly he cannot fail to know
My tender body waits him here ;
And if he knows, I have no fear
For poor Jehane du Castel beau.'

She took a sword within her hand,
Whose hilts were silver, and she sung, 110
Somehow like this, wild words that rung
A long way over the moonlit land :—

Gold wings across the sea !
Grey light from tree to tree,
Gold hair beside my knee,
I pray thee come to me,
Gold wings !

The water slips,
The red-bill'd moorhen dips.
Sweet kisses on red lips ;
Alas ! the red rust grips,
And the blood-red dagger rips,
Yet, O knight, come to me !

Are not my blue eyes sweet ?
The west wind from the wheat
Blows cold across my feet ;
Is it not time to meet
Gold wings across the sea ?

White swans on the green moat,
Small feathers left afloat
By the blue-painted boat;
Swift running of the stoat ;
Sweet gurgling note by note
Of sweet music.

130

O gold wings,
Listen how gold hair sings,
And the Ladies' Castle rings,
Gold wings across the sea.

I sit on a purple bed,
Outside, the wall is red,
Thereby the apple hangs,
And the wasp, caught by the fangs,

140

Dies in the autumn night.
And the bat flits till light,
And the love-crazed knight

Kisses the long wet-grass :
The weary days pass,—
Gold wings across the sea !

Gold wings across the sea !
Moonlight from tree to tree,
Sweet hair laid on my knee,
O, sweet knight, come to me !

150

Gold wings, the short night slips,
The white swan's long neck drips,
I pray thee, kiss my lips,
Gold wings across the sea.

No answer through the moonlit night ;
No answer in the cold grey dawn ;
No answer when the shaven lawn
Grew green, and all the roses bright.

Her tired feet look'd cold and thin,
Her lips were twitch'd, and wretched tears,
Some, as she lay, roll'd past her ears, 161
Some fell from off her quivering chin.

Her long throat, stretch'd to its full length,
Rose up and fell right brokenly ;
As though the unhappy heart was nigh
Striving to break with all its strength.

And when she slipp'd from off the bed,
Her cramp'd feet would not hold her ; she
Sank down and crept on hand and knee,
On the window-sill she laid her head. 170

There, with crooked arm upon the sill,
She look'd out, muttering dismally :
' There is no sail upon the sea,
No pennon on the empty hill.

' I cannot stay here all alone,
Or meet their happy faces here,
And wretchedly I have no fear ;
A little while, and I am gone.'

Therewith she rose upon her feet,
And totter'd ; cold and misery 180
Still made the deep sobs come, till she
At last stretch'd out her fingers sweet,
And caught the great sword in her hand ;
And, stealing down the silent stair,
Barefooted in the morning air,
And only in her smock, did stand

Upright upon the green lawn grass ;
And hope grew in her as she said :
‘ I have thrown off the white and red,
And pray God it may come to pass

190

‘ I meet him ; if ten years go by
Before I meet him ; if, indeed,
Meanwhile both soul and body bleed,
Yet there is end of misery,

‘ And I have hope. He could not come,
But I can go to him and show
These new things I have got to know,
And make him speak, who has been dumb.’

O Jehane ! the red morning sun
Changed her white feet to glowing gold,
Upon her smock, on crease and fold,
Changed that to gold which had been dun.

199

O Miles, and Giles, and Isabeau,
Fair Ellayne le Violet,
Mary, Constance fille de fay !
Where is Jehane du Castel beau ?

O big Gervaise ride apace !
Down to the hard yellow sand,
Where the water meets the lard.
This is Jehane by her face ;

210

Why has she a broken sword ?
Mary ! she is slain outright ;
Verily a piteous sight ;
Take her up without a word !

Giles and Miles and Gervaise there,
Ladies’ Gard must meet the war ;
Whatsoever knights these are,
Man the walls withouten fear !

Axes to the apple-trees,
Axes to the aspens tall ! 220
Barriers without the wall
May be lightly made of these.

O poor shivering Isabeau ;
Poor Ellayne le Violet,
Bent with fear ! we miss to-day
Brave Jehane du Castel beau.

O poor Mary, weeping so !
Wretched Constance fille de fay !
Verily we miss to-day
Fair Jehane du Castel beau. 230

The apples now grow green and sour
Upon the mouldering castle-wall,
Before they ripen there they fall :
There are no banners on the tower.

The draggled swans most eagerly eat
The green weeds trailing in the moat ;
Inside the rotting leaky boat
You see a slain man's stiffen'd feet.

THE HAYSTACK IN THE FLOODS

HAD she come all the way for this,
To part at last without a kiss ?
Yea, had she borne the dirt and rain
That her own eyes might see him slain
Beside the haystack in the floods ?
Along the dripping leafless woods,
The stirrup touching either shoe,
She rode astride as troopers do ;
With kirtle kilted to her knee,

132 THE HAYSTACK IN THE FLOODS

To which the mud splash'd wretchedly ;
And the wet dripp'd from every tree
Upon her head and heavy hair,
And on her eyelids broad and fair ;
The tears and rain ran down her face.

By fits and starts they rode apace,
And very often was his place
Far off from her , he had to ride
Ahead, to see what might betide
When the roads cross'd ; and sometimes, when
There rose a murmuring from his men, 20
Had to turn back with promises ;
Ah me ! she had but little ease ;
And often for pure doubt and dread
She sobb'd, made giddy in the head
By the swift riding ; while, for cold,
Her slender fingers scarce could hold
The wet reins ; yea, and scarcely, too,
She felt the foot within her shoe
Against the stirrup : all for this,
To part at last without a kiss 30
Beside the haystack in the floods.

For when they near'd that old soak'd hay,
They saw across the only way
That Judas, Godmar, and the three
Red running lions dismally
Grinn'd from his pennon, under which,
In one straight line along the ditch,
They counted thirty heads.

So then,
While Robert turn'd round to his men,
She saw at once the wretched end, 40
And, stooping down, tried hard to rend

Her coif the wrong way from her head,
 And hid her eyes ; while Robert said :
 ‘ Nay, love, ’tis scarcely two to one,
 At Poitiers where we made them run
 So fast—why, sweet my love, good cheet,
 The Gascon frontier is so near,
 Nought after this.’

But, ‘ O,’ she said,
 ‘ My God ! my God ! I have to tread
 The long way back without you , then 50
 The court at Paris ; those six men ;
 The gratings of the Chatelet ;
 The swift Seine on some rainy day
 Like this, and people standing by,
 And laughing, while my weak hands try
 To recollect how strong men swim.
 All this, or else a life with him,
 For which I should be damned at last,
 Would God that this next hour were past !’

He answer’d not, but cried his cry, 60
 ‘ St. George for Marny !’ cheerily ;
 And laid his hand upon her rein.
 Alas ! no man of all his train
 Gave back that cheery cry again ;
 And, while for rage his thumb beat fast
 Upon his sword-hilts, some one cast
 About his neck a kerchief long,
 And bound him.

Then they went along
 To Godmar ; who said : ‘ Now, Jehane,
 Your lover’s life is on the wane 70
 So fast, that, if this very hour
 You yield not as my paramour,

134 THE HAYSTACK IN THE FLOODS

He will not see the rain leave off—
 Nay, keep your tongue from gibe and scoff,
 Sir Robert, or I slay you now.’
 She laid her hand upon her brow,
 Then gazed upon the palm, as though
 She thought her forehead bled, and—‘No.’
 She said, and turn’d her head away,
 As there were nothing else to say, 80
 And everything were settled: red
 Grew Godmar’s face from chin to head:
 ‘Jehane, on yonder hill there stands
 My castle, guarding well my lands:
 What hinders me from taking you,
 And doing that I list to do
 To your fair wilful body, while
 Your knight lies dead?’

A wicked smile

Wrinkled her face, her lips grew thin,
 A long way out she thrust her chin: 90
 ‘You know that I should strangle you
 While you were sleeping; or bite through
 Your throat, by God’s help—ah!’ she said,
 ‘Lord Jesus, pity your poor maid!
 For in such wise they hem me in,
 I cannot choose but sin and sin,
 Whatever happens: yet I think
 They could not make me eat or drink,
 And so should I just reach my rest.’
 ‘Nay, if you do not my behest, 100
 O Jehane! though I love you well,’
 Said Godmar, ‘would I fail to tell
 All that I know.’ ‘Foul lies,’ she said.
 ‘Eh? lies my Jehane? by God’s head,
 At Paris folks would deem them true!
 Do you know, Jehane, they cry for you,

"Jehane the brown! Jehane the brown!
 Give us Jehane to burn or drown!"—
 Eh—gag me Robert!—sweet my friend,
 This were indeed a piteous end 110
 For those long fingers, and long feet,
 And long neck, and smooth shoulders sweet;
 An end that few men would forget
 That saw it—So, an hour yet
 Consider, Jehane, which to take
 Of life or death!

So, scarce awake,
 Dismounting, did she leave that place,
 And totter some yards: with her face
 Turn'd upward to the sky she lay,
 Her head on a wet heap of hay, 120
 And fell asleep: and while she slept,
 And did not dream, the minutes crept
 Round to the twelve again; but she,
 Being waked at last, sigh'd quietly,
 And strangely childlike came, and said:
 'I will not.' Straightway Godmar's head,
 As though it hung on strong wires, turn'd
 Most sharply round, and his face burn'd.

For Robert—both his eyes were dry,
 He could not weep, but gloomily 130
 He seem'd to watch the rain; yea, too,
 His lips were firm; he tried once more
 To touch her lips; she reach'd out, sore
 And vain desire so tortured them,
 The poor grey lips, and now the hem
 Of his sleeve brush'd them.

With a start
 Up Godmar rose, thrust them apart;

136 THE HAYSTACK IN THE FLOODS

From Robert's throat he loosed the bands
Of silk and mail ; with empty hands
Held out, she stood and gazed, and saw, 140
The long bright blade without a flaw
Glide out from Godmar's sheath, his hand
In Robert's hair ; she saw him bend
Back Robert's head ; she saw him send
The thin steel down ; the blow told well,
Right backward the knight Robert fell,
And moan'd as dogs do, being half dead,
Unwitting, as I deem : so then
Godmar turn'd grinning to his men,
Who ran, some five or six, and beat 150
His head to pieces at their feet.

Then Godmar turn'd again and said :
' So, Jehane, the first fitte is read !
Take note, my lady, that your way
Lies backward to the Chatelet !'
She shook her head and gazed awhile
At her cold hands with a rueful smile,
As though this thing had made her mad.

This was the parting that they had
Beside the haystack in the floods. 160

TWO RED ROSES ACROSS THE MOON

THERE was a lady lived in a hall,
Large in the eyes, and slim and tall ;
And ever she sung from noon to noon,
Two red roses across the moon.

There was a knight came riding by
In early spring, when the roads were dry ;
And he heard that lady sing at the noon,
Two red roses across the moon.

TWO RED ROSES ACROSS THE MOON 137

Yet none the more he stopp'd at all,
But he rode a-gallop past the hall ; 10
And left that lady singing at noon,
Two red roses across the moon.

Because, forsooth, the battle was set,
And the scarlet and blue had got to be met,
He rode on the spur till the next warm noon :—
Two red roses across the moon.

But the battle was scatter'd from hill to hill,
From the windmill to the watermill ;
And he said to himself, as it near'd the noon,
Two red roses across the moon. 20

You scarce could see for the scarlet and blue,
A golden helm or a golden shoe ;
So he cried, as the fight grew thick at the noon,
Two red roses across the moon !

Verily then the gold bore through
The huddled spears of the scarlet and blue ;
And they cried, as they cut them down at the
noon,
Two red roses across the moon !

I trow he stopp'd when he rode again 29
By the hall, though draggled sore with the rain ;
And his lips were pinch'd to kiss at the noon
Two red roses across the moon.

Under the may she stoop'd to the crown,
All was gold, there was nothing of brown ;
And the horns blew up in the hall at noon,
Two red roses across the moon.

WELLAND RIVER

FAIR Ellayne she walk'd by Welland river,
 Across the lily lee :
 O, gentle Sir Robert, ye are not kind
 To stay so long at sea.

Over the marshland none can see
 Your scarlet pennon fair ;
 O, leave the Easterlings alone,
 Because of my golden hair.

The day when over Stamford bridge
 That dear pennon I see 10
 Go up toward the goodly street,
 'Twill be a fair day for me.

O, let the bonny pennon bide
 At Stamford, the good town,
 And let the Easterlings go free,
 And their ships go up and down.

For every day that passes by
 I wax both pale and green,
 From gold to gold of my girdle
 There is an inch between. 20

I sew'd it up with scarlet silk
 Last night upon my knee,
 And my heart grew sad and sore to think
 Thy face I'd never see.

I sew'd it up with scarlet silk,
 As I lay upon my bed :
 Sorrow ! the man I'll never see
 That had my maidenhead.

But as Ellayne sat on her window-seat
And comb'd her yellow hair,
She saw come over Stamford bridge
The scarlet pennon fair.

30

As Ellayne lay and sicken'd sore,
The gold shoes on her feet,
She saw Sir Robert and his men
Ride up the Stamford street.

He had a coat of fine red gold,
And a bascinet of steel ;
Take note his goodly Collayne sword
Smote the spur upon his heel.

40

And by his side, on a grey jennet,
There rode a fair lady,
For every ruby Ellayne wore,
I count she carried three,

Say, was not Ellayne's gold hair fine,
That fell to her middle free ?
But that lady's hair down in the street,
Fell lower than her knee.

Fair Ellayne's face, from sorrow and grief,
Was waxen pale and green :
That lady's face was goodly red,
She had but little tene.

50

But as he pass'd by her window
He grew a little wroth :
O, why does yon pale face look at me,
From out the golden cloth ?

It is some burd, the fair dame said
That aye rode him beside,
Has come to see your bonny face
This merry summer-tide.

60

But Ellayne let a lily-flower
Light on his cap of steel :
O, I have gotten two hounds, fair knight,
The one has served me well.

But the other, just an hour ago,
Has come from over sea,
And all his fell is sleek and fine,
But little he knows of me.

Now, which shall I let go, fair knight,
And which shall bide with me ? 70
O, lady, have no doubt to keep
The one that best loveth thee.

O, Robert, see how sick I am !
Ye do not so by me.
Lie still, fair love ! have ye gotten harm
While I was on the sea ?

Of one gift, Robert, that ye gave,
I sicken to the death,
I pray you nurse-tend me, my knight,
Whiles that I have my breath. 80

Six fathoms from the Stamford bridge
He left that dame to stand,
And whiles she wept, and whiles she cursed
That she ever had taken land,

He has kiss'd sweet Ellayne on the mouth,
And fair she fell asleep,
And long and long days after that
Sir Robert's house she did keep.

RIDING TOGETHER ¹

For many, many days together
 The wind blew steady from the East ;
 For many days hot grew the weather,
 About the time of our Lady's Feast.
 For many days we rode together.
 Yet met we neither friend nor foe ;
 Hotter and clearer grew the weather,
 Steadily did the East wind blow.
 We saw the trees in the hot, bright weather.
 Clear-cut, with shadows very black, 10
 As freely we rode on together
 With helms unlaced and bridles slack.
 And often, as we rode together,
 We, looking down the green-bank'd stream,
 Saw flowers in the sunny weather,
 And saw the bubble-making bream.
 And in the night lay down together,
 And hung above our heads the rood,
 Or watch'd night-long in the dewy weather,
 The while the moon did watch the wood. 20
 Our spears stood bright and thick together,
 Straight out the banners stream'd behind,
 As we gallop'd on in the sunny weather,
 With faces turn'd towards the wind.
 Down sank our threescore spears together,
 As thick we saw the pagans ride ;
 His eager face in the clear fresh weather,
 Shone out that last time by my side.

¹ This poem had previously appeared in *The Oxford and Cambridge Magazine*, May 1856.

Up the sweep of the bridge we dash'd together,
It rock'd to the crash of the meeting spears,
Down rain'd the buds of the dear spring weather,
The elm-tree flowers fell like tears. 32

There, as we roll'd and writhed together,
I threw my arms above my head,
For close by my side, in the lovely weather,
I saw him reel and fall back dead.

I and the slayer met together,
He waited the death-stroke there in his place,
With thoughts of death, in the lovely weather,
Gapingly mazed at my madden'd face. 40

Madly I fought as we fought together ;
In vain : the little Christian band
The pagans drown'd, as in stormy weather,
The river drowns low-lying land.

They bound my blood-stain'd hands together,
They bound his corpse to nod by my side :
Then on we rode, in the bright March weather,
With clash of cymbals did we ride.

We ride no more, no more together ;
My prison-bars are thick and strong, 50
I take no heed of any weather,
The sweet Saints grant I live not long.

FATHER JOHN'S WAR-SONG

THE REAPERS.

So many reapers, Father John,
 So many reapers and no little son,
 To meet you when the day is done,
 With little stiff legs to waddle and run ?
 Pray you beg, borrow, or steal one son.
 Hurrah for the corn-sheaves of Father John !

FATHER JOHN.

O maiden Mary, be wary, be wary !
 And go not down to the river,
 Lest the kingfisher, your evil wisher,
 Lure you down to the river, 10
 Lest your white feet grow muddy,
 Your red hair too ruddy
 With the river-mud so red :
 But when you are wed
 Go down to the river ;
 O maiden Mary, be very wary,
 And dwell among the corn !
 See, this dame Alice, maiden Mary,
 Her hair is thin and white,
 But she is a housewife good and wary, 20
 And a great steel key hangs bright-
 From her gown, as red as the flowers in corn ;
 She is good and old like the autumn corn.

MAIDEN MARY.

This is knight Roland, Father John,
 Stark in his arms from a field half-won ;
 Ask him if he has seen your son :

144 FATHER JOHN'S WAR-SONG

Roland, lay your sword on the corn,
The piled-up sheaves of the golden corn.

KNIGHT ROLAND.

Why does she kiss me, Father John ?
She is my true love truly won ; 30
Under my helm is room for one,
But the molten lead-streams trickle and run
From my roof-tree, burning under the sun ;
No corn to burn, we had eaten the corn,
There was no waste of the golden corn.

FATHER JOHN.

Ho, you reapers, away from the corn,
To march with the banner of Father John !

THE REAPERS.

We will win a house for Roland his son,
And for maiden Mary with hair like corn,
As red as the reddest of golden corn. 40

OMNES.

Father John, you have got you a son,
Seven feet high when his helm is on !
Pennon of Roland, banner of John,
Star of Mary, march well on.

SIR GILES' WAR-SONG

*Ho ! is there any will ride with me,
Sir Giles, le bon des barrières ?*

The clink of arms is good to hear,
The flap of pennons fair to see ;
*Ho ! is there any will ride with me,
Sir Giles, le bon des barrières ?*

The leopards and lilies are fair to see,
'St. George Guienne' right good to hear :

*Ho ! is there any will ride with me,
Sir Giles, le bon des barrières ?*

10

I stood by the barrier,
My coat being blazon'd fair to see ;

*Ho ! is there any will ride with me,
Sir Giles, le bon des barrières ?*

Clisson put out his head to see,
And lifted his basnet up to hear ;

I pull'd him through the bars to ME,
Sir Giles, le bon des barrières.

NEAR AVALON

A SHIP with shields before the sun,
Six maidens round the mast,
A red-gold crown on every one,
A green gown on the last.

The fluttering green banners there
Are wrought with ladies' heads most fair,
And a portraiture of Guenevere
The middle of each sail doth bear.

A ship with sails before the wind,
And round the helm six knights, 10
Their heaumes are on, whereby, half blind,
They pass by many sights.

The tatter'd scarlet banners there,
Right soon will leave the spear-heads bare,
Those six knights sorrowfully bear
In all their heaumes some yellow hair.

PRAISE OF MY LADY

My lady seems of ivory
Forehead, straight nose, and cheeks that be
Hollow'd a little mournfully.

Beata mea Domina !

Her forehead, overshadow'd much
By bows of hair, has a wave such
As God was good to make for me.

Beata mea Domina !

Not greatly long my lady's hair,
Nor yet with yellow colour fair,
But thick and crisped wonderfully :

10

Beata mea Domina !

Heavy to make the pale face sad,
And dark, but dead as though it had
Been forged by God most wonderfully

—*Beata mea Domina !*—

Of some strange metal, thread by thread,
To stand out from my lady's head,
Not moving much to tangle me.

Beata mea Domina !

20

Beneath her brows the lids fall slow,
The lashes a clear shadow throw
Where I would wish my lips to be.

Beata mea Domina !

Her great eyes, standing far apart,
Draw up some memory from her heart,
And gaze out very mournfully ;

—*Beata mea Domina !*—

So beautiful and kind they are,
But most times looking out afar,
Waiting for something, not for me.

30

Beata mea Domina !

I wonder if the lashes long
Are those that do her bright eyes wrong,
For always half tears seem to be

—Beata mea Domina !—

Lurking below the underlid,
Darkening the place where they lie hid—
If they should rise and flow for me '

Beata mea Domina !

40

Her full lips being made to kiss,
Curl'd up and pensive each one is ;
This makes me faint to stand and see,

Beata mea Domina !

Her lips are not contented now,
Because the hours pass so slow
Towards a sweet time : (pray for me),

—Beata mea Domina !—

Nay, hold thy peace ! for who can tell ;
But this at least I know full well,
Her lips are parted longingly,

50

—Beata mea Domina !—

So passionate and swift to move,
To pluck at any flying love,
That I grow faint to stand and see.

Beata mea Domina !

Yea ! there beneath them is her chin,
So fine and round, it were a sin
To feel no weaker when I see

—Beata mea Domina !—

60

God's dealings ; for with so much care
And troublous, faint lines wrought in there,
He finishes her face for me.

Beata mea Domina !

Of her long neck what shall I say ?
What thing about her body's sway,
Like a knight's pennon or slim tree
—*Beata mea Domina !*—

Set gently waving in the wind ;
Or her long hands that I may find 70
On some day sweet to move o'er me ?
Beata mea Domina !

God pity me though, if I miss'd
The telling, how along her wrist
The veins creep, dying languidly
—*Beata mea Domina !*—

Inside her tender palm and thin.
Now give me pardon, dear, wherein
My voice is weak and vexes thee.
Beata mea Domina ! 80

All men that see her any time,
I charge you straightly in this rhyme,
What, and wherever you may be,
—*Beata mea Domina !*—

To kneel before her ; as for me,
I choke and grow quite faint to see
My lady moving graciously.
Beata mea Domina ! 88

SUMMER DAWN¹

PRAY but one prayer for me 'twixt thy closed
 lips,
 Think but one thought of me up in the stars.
 The summer night waneth, the morning light
 slips,
 Faint and grey 'twixt the leaves of the aspen,
 betwixt the cloud-bars,
 That are patiently waiting there for the dawn :
 Patient and colourless, though Heaven's gold
 Waits to float through them along with the sun.
 Far out in the meadows, above the young corn,
 The heavy elms wait, and restless and cold
 The uneasy wind rises ; the roses are dun ;
 Through the long twilight they pray for the dawn,
 Round the lone house in the midst of the corn.
 Speak but one word to me over the corn,
 Over the tender, bow'd locks of the corn.

IN PRISON²

WEARILY, drearily,
 Half the day long,
 Flap the great banners
 High over the stone ;
 Strangely and eerily
 Sounds the wind's song,
 Bending the banner-poles.

¹ This poem had previously appeared in *The Oxford and Cambridge Magazine*, October 1856.

² This poem had previously appeared in ' Frank's Sealed Letter ' in *The Oxford and Cambridge Magazine*, April 1856.

IN PRISON

While, all alone,
Watching the loophole's spark,
Lie I, with life all dark,
Feet tether'd, hands fetter'd
Fast to the stone,
The grim walls, square letter'd
With prison'd men's groan.

Still strain the banner-poles
Through the wind's song,
Westward the banner rolls
Over my wrong.

THE LIFE AND DEATH OF JASON

A POEM

1867

(First published in 1867. Reprinted here from the second edition, revised, 1868. The alternative readings given at the foot of the page are those of the first edition.)

ARGUMENT

JASON, the son of Æson, king of Iolchos, having come to man's estate, demanded of Pelias his father's kingdom, which he held wrongfully. But Pelias answered, that if he would bring from Colchis the golden fleece of the ram that had carried Phryxus thither, he would yield him his right. Whereon Jason sailed to Colchis in the ship Argo, with other heroes, and by means of Medea, the king's daughter, won the fleece; and carried off also Medea; and so, after many troubles, came back to Iolchos again. There, by Medea's wiles, was Pelias slain; but Jason went to Corinth, and lived with Medea happily, till he was taken with the love of Glauce, the king's daughter of Corinth, and must needs wed her; whom also Medea destroyed, and fled to Ægeus at Athens; and not long after Jason died strangely.

THE LIFE AND DEATH OF JASON

BOOK I

Jason having grown up to manhood in the woods, is
warned of what his life shall be.

IN Thessaly, beside the tumbling sea,
Once dwelt a folk, men called the Minyæ ;
For, coming from Orchomenus the old,
Bearing their wives and children, beasts and gold,
Through many a league of land they took their
way,

And stopped at last, where in a sunny bay
The green Anaurus cleaves the white sea-sand,
And eastward inland doth Mount Pelion stand,
Where bears and wolves the centaurs' arrows find ;
And southward is a gentle sea and kind, 10
Nigh landlocked, peopled with all kinds of fish,
And the good land yields all that man can wish.

So there they built Iolchos, that each day
Grew great, until all these were passed away,
With many another, and Cretheus the king
Had died, and left his crown and everything
To Æson, his own son by fair Tyro ;
Whom, in unhappy days and long ago,
A God had loved, whose son was Pelias.

And so, within a while, it came to pass 20
This Pelias, being covetous and strong
And full of wiles, and deeming naught was wrong

That wrought him good, thrust Æson from his throne,

And over all the Minyæ reigned alone ;
 While Æson, like a poor and feeble lord,
 Dwelt in Iolchos still, nor was his word
 Regarded much by any man therein, 27
 Nor did men labour much his praise to win.

Now 'mid all this a fair young son he had ;
 And when his state thus fell from good to bad
 He thought, Though Pelias leave me now alone,
 Yet he may wish to make quite sure his throne
 By slaying me and mine, some evil day ;
 Therefore the child will I straight send away,
 Ere Pelias feels his high seat tottering,
 And gets to know the terrors of a king,
 That blood alone can deaden. Therewithal
 A faithful slave unto him did he call,
 And bade him from his nurses take the child
 And bear him forth unto the forest wild 40
 About the foot of Pelion : There should he
 Blow loudly on a horn of ivory
 That Æson gave him ; then would come to him
 A Centaur, grave of face and large of limb,
 Before whom he should fall upon his knees
 And, holding forth the child, say words like
 these :

' O my lord Chiron, Æson sends me here
 To say, if ever you have held him dear,
 Take now this child, his son, and rear him up
 Till we have fully drained the bitter cup 50
 The fates have filled for us ; and if times change
 While through the peaceful oakwood here you
 range,
 And the crown comes upon the youngling's head,
 Then, though a king right fair apparelled,

Yet unto you shall he be but a slave,
 Since now from fear his tender years you save ; '
 ' And then,' quoth Æson, ' all these words being
 said,

Hold out this ring, set with a ruby red,
 Adorned with dainty little images,
 And this same horn, whereon, 'twixt carven
 trees, 60

Diana follows up the flying hart ;
 They shall be signs of truth upon your part.
 Then leave the child with him, and come to me,
 Minding what words the Centaur saith to thee ;
 Of whom thou needest have no whit of fear ;
 And, ere thou goest, bring me the child here.'

Then went the man and came again to him
 With Jason, who was strong and large of limb
 As for his years, and now upon his feet
 Went firmly, and began to feel life sweet, 70
 And longed for this and that, and on his tongue,
 Bewildered, half articulate, speech hung.

But Æson, when he saw the sturdy boy,
 His bright round limbs and face lit up with joy
 Of very life, sighed deeply, and he said :
 ' O child, I pray the Gods to spare thine head
 The burden of a crown ; were it not good
 That thou shouldst live and die within this wood
 That clothes the feet of Pelion, knowing naught
 Of all the things by foolish men so sought ;
 For there, no doubt, is everything man needs,—
 The quiver, with the iron-pointed reeds, 80
 The cornel bow, the wood-knife at the side,
 The garments of the spotted leopard's hide,
 The bed of bear-skin in the hollow hill,
 The bath within the pool of some green rill ;

There shall the quick-eyed centaurs be thy
friends,

Unto whose hearts such wisdom great Jove sends
They know the past and future, and fear naught
That by the fates upon them may be brought.
And when the spring brings love, then mayst
thou find

In some fair grassy place, the wood-nymphs kind,
And choose thy mate, and with her, hand in
hand,

Go wandering through the blossoming sweetland;
And naught of evil there shall come to thee,
But like the golden age shall all things be;
And when upon thee falls the fated day,
Fearless and painless shalt thou pass away.'

So spoke he foolishly, nor knew indeed⁹⁹
How many hearts his son should make to bleed,
How many griefs his head, whitened with care
Long ere its time, before his death should bear.

Now, since the moonless night and dark was
come,
Time was it that the child should leave his home;
And saddled in the court the stout horse stood
That was to bear them to the Centaur's wood;
And the tried slave stood ready by his lord,
With wallet on his back, and sharpened sword
Girt to his side; to whom the horn and ring,
Fit for the belt and finger of a king,¹¹⁰
Did Æson give, and therewith kissed the boy,
Who with his black beard played, and laughed
for joy

To see the war-horse in the red torch-light.
At last, being mounted, forth into the night
They rode, and thus has Jason left his home.

All night they rode, and at the dawn, being
come

Unto the outskirts of the forest wild,
They left the horse, and the still sleeping child
The slave bore in his arms, until they came
Unto the place where, living free from blame,
Chiron the old roamed through the oaken wood ;
There by a flowering thorn-bush the slave stood,
And set the little Jason on the ground : 123
Who, waking from sweet sleep, looked all around
And 'gan to prattle ; but his guardian drew
The horn from off his neck, and thereon blew
A point of hunting known to two or three,
That sounded through the forest merrily,
Then waited listening.

And meantime the sun,
Come from Eubœan cliffs, had just begun 130
To light the high tips of the forest grass,
And in the thorn the blackbird singing was ;
But 'mid his noise the listening man could hear
The sound of hoofs, whereat a little fear
He felt within his heart, and heeded naught
The struggling of the child, who ever sought
To gain the horn all glittering of bright gold,
Wrought by the cunning Dædalus of old.

But louder still the noise he hearkened grew,
Until at last in sight the Centaur drew, 140
A mighty grey horse, trotting down the glade,
Over whose back the long grey locks were laid,
That from his reverend head abroad did flow ;
For to the waist was man, but all below
A mighty horse, once roan, now well-nigh white
With lapse of years ; with oak-wreaths was he
dight

137 of bright gold] of gold

158 LIFE AND DEATH OF JASON

Where man joined unto horse, and on his head
 He wore a gold crown, set with rubies red,
 And in his hand he bare a mighty bow, 149
 No man could bend of those that battle now.

So, when he saw him coming through the trees,
 The trembling slave sunk down upon his knees
 And put the child before him ; but Chiron,
 Who knew all things, cried : ' Man with Æson's
 son,

Thou needest not to tell me who thou art,
 Nor will I fail to do to him my part :
 A vain thing were it, truly, if I strove,
 Such as I am, against the will of Jove.
 Lo now, this youngling, set 'twixt thee and me,
 In days to come a mighty man shall be, 160
 Well-nigh the mightiest of all those that dwell
 Between Olympus and Malea ; and well
 Shall Juno love him till he come to die.

' Now get thee to thy master presently,
 But leave with me the red ring and the horn,
 That folk may know of whom this boy was born
 In days to come, when he shall leave this wild :
 And lay between my arms the noble child.'

So the slave joyful, but still half afraid,
 Within the mighty arms young Jason laid, 170
 And gave up both the horn and the red ring
 Unto the Centaur, who the horn did sling
 About him ; on his finger, with a smile,
 Setting the ring ; and in a little while
 The slave departing, reached the open plain,
 And straight he mounted on his horse again,
 And rode on toward Iolchos all the day,
 And as the sunset darkened every way,
 He reached the gates, and coming to his lord,
 Bid him rejoice, and told him every word 180

That Chiron said. Right glad was Æson then
That from his loins a great man among men
Should thus have sprung ; and so he passed his
days

Full quietly, remote from fear or praise.

And now was Pelias mindful of the day
When from the altar's horns he drew away
Sidero's cruel hands, while Neleus smote
The golden-hilted sword into her throat,
And without fire, or barley-cake, or cup,
No pleasing victim, she was offered up 190
In Juno's temple ; so he feared that he,
Though sprung from him who rules the restless
sea,

Should meet an evil fate at Juno's hands :
Therefore he sent for men from many lands,
Marble and wood, and gold and brass enow,
And day by day, with many a sounding blow,
The masons wrought, until at last was reared
A temple to the Goddess that he feared ;—
A wonder among temples, for the stone
That made it, and the gold that therein shone.
And in the midst her image Pelias set, 201
Wrought cunningly of purest gold, which yet
Had served him better in his treasury,
So little store the Goddess set thereby.

Moreover to Dodona, where the doves
Amid the oak-trees murmur of their loves,
He sent a messenger to know his fate ;
Who, up the temple steps, beneath the weight
Of precious things went bending ; and being
come 209

Back from the north to his Thessalian home,
Gave forth this answer to the doubtful king :—
' O Pelias, fearful of so many a thing,

Sit merry o'er thy wine, sleep safe and soft,
 Within thy golden bed ; for surely oft
 The snows shall fall before the half-shod man
 Can come upon thee through the water wan.'

So at this word the king along the shore
 Built many a tower, and ever more and more
 Drew men unto him skilled in spear and bow ;
 And through the streets full often would he go
 Beset with guards, and for the rest began ²²¹
 To be a terror unto every man.

And yet indeed were all these things but vain,
 For at the foot of Pelion grew his bane
 In strength and comeliness from day to day,
 And swiftly passed his childish years away :
 Unto whom Chiron taught the worthy lore
 Of elders who the wide world filled before ;
 And how to forge his iron arrow-heads ;
 And how to find within the marshy steads ²³⁰
 The stoutest reeds, and from some slain bird's
 wing

To feather them, and make a deadly thing ;
 And through the woods he took him, nor would
 spare

To show him how the just-awakened bear
 Came hungry from his tree, or show him how
 The spotted leopard's lurking-place to know ;
 And many a time they brought the hart to bay,
 Or smote the boar at hottest of the day.

Now was his dwelling-place a fair-hewn cave,
 Facing the south : thereto the herdsmen drave
 Full oft to Chiron woolly sheep, and neat, ²⁴¹
 And brought him wine and garden-honey sweet,
 And fruits that flourish well in the fat plain,
 And cloth and linen, and would take again

Skins of slain beasts, and little lumps of gold
Washed from the high crags : then would Chiron
hold.

Upon the sunny lawns, high feast with them,
And garland all about the ancient stem
Of some great tree, and there do sacrifice
Unto the Gods, and with grave words and wise
Tell them sweet tales of elders passed away :
But for some wished thing every man would pray
Or ever in their hands the steel did shine, 252
And or the sun lit up the bubbling wine ;
Then would they fall to meat, nor would they
leave

Their joyances, until the dewy eve
 Had given good heart unto the nightingale
 To tell the sleepy wood-nymphs all his tale.

Moreover, Chiron taught him how to cast
His hand across the lyre, until there passed
Such sweetness through the woods, that all
about

The wood-folk gathered, and the merry rout
That called on Bacchus, hearkening, stayed
awhile,

And in the chase the hunter, with a smile,
From his raised hand let fall the noisy horn,
When to his ears the sweet strange sound was
borne

But in the night-time once did Jason wake,
And seem to see the moonlit branches shake
With huge, unwonted clamour of the chase ;
Then up he sprung, but ere he went one pace
Unto the cave's mouth, Chiron raised his arm
And drew him back, and said : ' Surely, no
charm

Thou hast, my son, against Diana's sight,

Who over Pelion goes abroad this night ;
Now let those go to her that she doth call,
Because no fenced town, brazen gate or wall,
No coat of mail, or seven-folded shield,
Can guard thee from the wound that ne'er is
healed,

278

When she is angry. Sleep again, my son,
Nor wish to spoil great deeds not yet begun.'

Then Jason lay and trembled, while the sound
Grew louder through the moonlit woods around,
And died off slowly, going toward the sea,
Leaving the fern-owl wailing mournfully.

Thereafter wandering lonely did he meet
A maid, with girt-up gown and sandalled feet,
Who joyously through flowering grass did go,
Holding within her hand an unstrung bow ;
And, setting eyes on her, he thought, indeed,
This must be she that made Actæon bleed ;
For, certes, ere that day he had not seen 291
Within that wild, one made so like a queen.

So, doubtful, he held back, nor dared to love
Her rosy feet, or ivory knees above,
And, with half-lifted eyes, could scarcely dare
To gaze upon her eyes or golden hair,
Or hidden bosom : but she called aloud,—
'Tell me, fair youth, if thou hast seen a crowd
Of such as I go through these woods to-day ?'
And when his stammering tongue no word could
say,

300

She smiled upon him, and said, ' Who art thou,
Who seemest fitter from some galley's prow
To lead the heroes on the merchant-town,
Than through the wilds to hunt the poor beasts
down,
Or underneath the canopy to sit,

Than by the beech to watch the cushat flit ?
 Speak out, and fear not.'

'O, my queen !' said he,
 'Fair Goddess, as thou seemest well to be,
 Give me good days and peace, and maiden's love.
 And let great kings send out their sons to rove ;
 But as for me, my name is little known. 311
 I am but Jason, who dwell here alone
 With Chiron in the hollow mountain-side,
 Wishful for happy days, whate'er betide.'

'Jason,' she said, 'all folk shall know thy
 name,
 For verily the Gods shall give thee fame,
 Whatever they keep back from thee : behold
 Restless thou shalt be, as thou now art bold ;
 And cunning, as thou now art skilled to watch
 The crafty bear, and in the toils to catch 320
 The grey-maned yellow lion ; and now see
 Thou doest my commands, for certainly
 I am no mortal ; so to Chiron tell
 No longer is it fitting thou shouldst dwell
 Here in the wilds, but in a day or two,
 Clad in Magnesian garments, shalt thou go
 Unto Iolchos, and there claim thine own.
 And unto thee shall Chiron first make known
 The story of thy father and thy kin,
 That thou mayst know what right thou hast
 herein. 330

And say to him, I bid him do this thing,
 By this same token, that the silver ring
 Upon mine altar, with Sidero's blood
 Is spotted still, and that the half-charred wood
 My priests had lighted early on that day,
 Yet lies thereon, by no flame burnt away.'

BOOK II

Jason claims his own—Pelias tells about the Golden
Fleece—Jason vows the quest thereof.

So there they lay until the second dawn
Broke fair and fresh o'er glittering glade and lawn;
Then Jason rose, and did on him a fair
Blue woollen tunic, such as folk do wear
On the Magnesian cliffs, and at his thigh
An iron-hilted sword hung carefully;
And on his head he had a russet hood;
And in his hand two spears of cornel-wood,
Well steeled and bound with brazen bands he
shook.

Then from the Centaur's hands at last he took
The tokens of his birth, the ring and horn, 11
And so stepped forth into the sunny morn,
And bade farewell to Chiron, and set out
With eager heart, that held small care or doubt.

So lightly through the well-known woods he
passed,
And came out to the open plain at last,
And went till night came on him, and then slept
Within a homestead that a poor man kept;
And rose again at dawn, and slept that night
Nigh the Anaurus, and at morrow's light 20
Rose up and went unto the river's brim;
But fearful seemed the passage unto him,
For swift and yellow drave the stream adown
'Twixt crumbling banks; and tree-trunks rough
and brown

Whirled in the bubbling eddies here and there;
So swollen was the stream a maid might dare
To cross, in fair days, with unwetted knee.

Then Jason with his spear-shaft carefully

Sounded the depth, nor any bottom found ;
 And wistfully he cast his eyes around 30
 To see if help was nigh, and heard a voice
 Behind him, calling out, ' Fair youth, rejoice
 That I am here to help, or certainly
 Long time a dweller hereby shouldst thou be.'

Then Jason turned round quickly, and beheld
 A woman, bent with burdens and with eld,
 Grey and broad shouldered; so he laughed, and
 said :

' O mother, wilt thou help me ? by my head,
 More help than thine I need upon this day.'

' O son,' she said, ' needs must thou on thy way ;
 And is there any of the giants here 41
 To bear thee through this water without fear ?
 Take, then, the help a God has sent to thee.
 For in mine arms a small thing shalt thou be.'

So Jason laughed no more, because a frown
 Gathered upon her brow, as she cast down
 Her burden to the earth, and came a-nigh,
 And raised him in her long arms easily,
 And stept adown into the water cold. 49

There with one arm the hero did she hold,
 And with the other thrust the whirling trees
 Away from them ; and laughing, and with ease
 Went through the yellow foaming stream, and
 came

Unto the other bank ; and little shame
 Had Jason that a woman carried him,
 For no man, howsoever strong of limb, 56
 Had dared across that swollen stream to go,
 But if he wished the Stygian stream to know ;
 Therefore he doubted not, that with some God
 Or reverend Goddess that rough way he trod.

So when she had clomb up the slippery bank

And let him go, well-nigh adown he sank,
 For he was dizzy with the washing stream,
 And with that passage mazed as with a dream.

But, turning round about unto the throne,
 He saw not her, but a most glorious one,
 A lady clad in blue, all glistening
 With something more than gold, crowned like
 the king 68

Of all the world, and holding in her hand
 A jewelled rod. So when he saw her stand
 With unsoiled feet scarce touching the wet way,
 He trembled sore, but therewith heard her say:—

‘O Jason, such as I have been to thee
 Upon this day, such ever will I be ;
 And I am Juno ; therefore doubt thou not
 A mighty helper henceforth thou hast got
 Against the swords and bitter tongues of men,
 For surely mayst thou lean upon me, when
 The turbulent and little-reasoning throng 79
 Press hard upon thee, or a king with wrong
 Would fain undo thee; as thou leanedst now
 Within the yellow stream : so from no blow
 Hold back thine hand, nor fear to set thine heart
 On what thou deemest fits thy kingly part.

‘Now to the king’s throne this day draw anear,
 Because of old time have I set a fear
 Within his heart, ere yet thou hadst gained
 speech,
 And whilst thou wanderedst beneath oak and
 beech

Unthinking. And, behold ! so have I wrought,
 That with thy coming shall a sign be brought
 Unto him ; for the latchet of thy shoe
 Rushing Anaurus late I bade undo, 92

86 have I] I have

Which now is carried swiftly to the sea.

'So Pelias, this day setting eyes on thee,
Shall not forget the shameful trickling blood
Adown my altar-steps, or in my wood
The screaming peacocks scared by other screams,
Nor yet to-night shall he dream happy dreams.

'Farewell then, and be joyful, for I go,
Unto the people, many a thing to show, 100
And set them longing for forgotten things,
Whose rash hands toss about the crowns of
kings.'

Therewith before his eyes a cloud there came,
Sweet-smelling, coloured like a rosy flame,
That wrapt the Goddess from him ; who, indeed,
Went to Iolchos, and there sowed the seed
Of bitter change, that ruins kings of men ;
For, like an elder of threescore and ten,
Throughout the town she went, and, as such do,
Ever she blessed the old, and banned the new ;
Lamenting for the passed and happy reign
Of Cretheus, wishing there were come again
One like to him ; till in the market-place 113
About the king was many a doubtful face.

Now Jason, by Anaurus left alone,
Found that, indeed, his right-foot shoe was gone,
But, as the Goddess bade him, went his way
Half shod, and by an hour before mid-day
He reached the city gates, and entered there,
Whom the folk mocked, beholding his foot bare,
And iron-hilted sword, and uncouth weed :
But of no man did he take any heed, 122
But came into the market-place, where thronged
Much folk about Him who his sire had wronged.
But when he stood within that busy stead,

Taller he showed than any by a head,
Great limbed, broad shouldered, mightier than
all,

But soft of speech, though unto him did fall
Full many a scorn upon that day to get. 129

So in a while he came where there was set
Pelias, the king, judging the people there ;
In scarlet was he clad, and o'er his hair,
Sprinkled with grey, he wore a royal crown,
And from an ivory throne he looked adown
Upon the suitors and the restless folk.

Now, when the yellow head of Jason broke
From out the throng, with fearless eyes and
grey,

A terror took the king, that ere that day
For many a peaceful year he had not felt,
And his hand fell upon his swordless belt ; 140
But when the hero strode up to the throne,
And set his unshod foot upon the stone
Of the last step thereof, and as he stood,
Drew off the last fold of his russet hood,
And with a clang let fall his brass-bound spear,
The king shrunk back, grown pale with deadly
fear ;

Nor then the oak-trees' speech did he forget,
Noting the one bare foot, and garments wet,
And something half remembered in his face.

And now nigh silent was the crowded place,
For through the folk remembrance Juno sent,
And soon from man to man a murmur went,
And frowning folk were whispering deeds of
shame 153

And wrong the king had wrought, and Æson's
name,

Forgotten long, was bandied all about.
And silent mouths seemed ready for a shout.

So, when the king raised up a hand, that
shook

With fear, and turned a wrathful, timorous look
On his Ætolian guards, upon his ears 159
There fell the clashing of the people's spears;
And on the house-tops round about the square
Could he behold folk gathered here and there,
And see the sunbeams strike on brass and steel.
But therewithal, though new fear did he feel,
He thought, 'Small use of arms in this distress,—
Needs is it that I use my wiliness;'
Then spoke aloud: 'O man, what wouldst thou
here,

That bearest thus a king with little fear?'

'Pelias,' he said, 'I will not call thee king,
Because thy crown is but a stolen thing. 170
And with a stolen sceptre dost thou reign,
Which now I bid thee render up again,
And on his father's throne my father set,
Whom for long years the Gods did well forget,
But now, in lapse of time, remembering,
Have raised me, Jason, up to do this thing,
His son, and son of fair Alcimidé,
Yet now, since Tyro's blood 'twixt thee and me
Still runs, and thou my father's brother art,
In no wise would I hurt thee, for my part, 180
If thou wilt render to us but our own,
'And still shalt thou stand nigh my father's
throne.'

Then all the people, when aright they knew,
That this was Æson's son, about them drew,
And when he ended gave a mighty shout;
But Pelias cleared his face of fear and doubt,

And answered Jason, smiling cunningly :—

‘ Yea, in good time thou comest unto me,
My nephew Jason ; fain would I lay down
This heavy weight and burden of a crown, 190
And have instead my brother’s love again,
I lost, to win a troublous thing and vain ;
And yet, since now thou showest me such good-
will,

Fain would I be a king a short while still,
That everything in order I may set,
Nor any man thereby may trouble get.
And now I bid thee stand by me to-day,
And cast all fear and troublous thoughts away ;
And for thy father Æson will I send, 199
That I may see him as a much-loved friend,
Now that these years of bitterness are passed,
And peaceful days are come to me at last.’

With that, from out the press grave Æson
came

E’en as he spoke ; for to his ears the fame
Of Jason’s coming thither had been brought ;
Wherefore, with eager eyes his son he sought ;
But, seeing the mighty hero great of limb,
Stopped short, with eyes set wistfully on him,
While a false honied speech the king began :
‘ Hail, brother Æson, hail, O happy man !
To-day thou winnest back a noble son, 211
Whose glorious deeds this fair hour sees begun,
And from my hands thou winnest back the crown
Of this revered and many-peopled town ;
So let me win from thee again thy love,
Nor with long anger slight the Gods above.’

Then Jason, holding forth the horn and ring,
Said to his father, ‘ Doubtest thou this thing ?

212 this fair hour] this hour

Behold the tokens Chiron gave to me
 When first he said that I was sprung from
 thee.' 220

Then little of those signs did Æson reck.
 But cast his arms about the hero's neck,
 And kissed him oft, remembering well the time
 When as he sat beneath the flowering lime
 Beside his house, the glad folk to him came
 And said : ' O King, all honour to thy name
 That will not perish surely, for thy son
 His royal life this day has just begun.'

Wherefore unto him, like an empty dream,
 The busy place, the king and folk did seem,
 As on that sight at last he set his eyes, 231
 Prayed for so oft with many a sacrifice ;
 And speechless for a while fain must he stand,
 Holding within his hand the mighty hand ;
 And as the wished-for son he thus beheld,
 Half mournful thoughts of swiftly-gathering eld
 Came thick upon him, till the salt tears ran
 On to the raiment of the goodly man ;
 Until at last he said : ' All honour now
 To Jove and all the Gods ! Surely, I know, 240
 Henceforth my name shall never perish ; yet
 But little joy of this man shall I get,
 For through the wide world where will be the
 king

Who will not fear him ; nor shall anything
 Be strong against him ; therefore certainly
 Full seldom will he ride afield with me,
 Nor will he long bear at his father's board
 To sit, well known of all, but with his sword
 Will rather burst asunder banded throngs
 Of evil men, healing the people's wrongs. 250

250 Of evil men, and heal some great king's wrongs.

‘ And as for thee, O Pelias, as I may,
 Will I be friend to thee from this same day ;
 And since we both of us are growing old,
 And both our lives will soon be as tales told,
 I think perchance that thou wilt let me be,
 To pass these few years in felicity
 That this one brings me.’

Thereon Pelias said :—

‘ Yea, if I hurt thee aught, then on my head
 Be every curse that thou canst ever think ;
 And dying, of an ill draught may I drink, 260
 For in my mind is naught but wish for rest.

‘ But on this day, I pray thee, be my guest,
 While yet upon my head I wear the crown,
 Which, ere this morning’s flowers have fallen
 down,

Your head shall bear again ; for in the hall,
 Upon the floor the fresh-plucked rushes fall,
 Even as we speak, and maids and men bear up
 The kingly service ; many a jewelled cup
 And silver platter ; and the fires roar 269
 About the stalled ox and the woodland boar ;
 And wine we have, that ere this youngling’s eyes
 First saw the light, made tears and laughter rise
 Up from men’s hearts, making the past seem dull,
 The future hollow, but the present full
 Of all delights, if quick they pass away ;
 And we, who have been foes for many a day,
 Surely, ere evening sees the pitcher dry,
 May yet be friends, and talking lovingly, 278
 And with our laughter make the pillars ring,
 While this one sits revolving many a thing,
 Saddened by that, which makes us elders glad.’

Such good words said he, but the thoughts were
 bad

Within his crafty breast ; and still he thought
How best he might be rid of him just brought,
By sentence of the Gods, upon his head.

Then moved the kinsmen from the market-stead
Between a lane of men, who ever pressed
About the princes, and with loud words blessed
The hero and his race, and thought no shame
To kiss his skirts ; and so at last they came 290
Unto the house that rustling limes did shade,
And thereabout was many a slender maid,
Who welcomed them with music and sweet song,
And cast red roses as they went along
Before their feet ; and therewith brought the three
Into the palace, where right royally
Was Jason clad, and seemed a prince indeed.

So while the harp-string and shrill-piping reed
Still sounded, trooped the folk unto the feast,
And all were set to meat, both most and least ;
And when with dainties they were fully fed,
Then the tall jars and well-sewn goat-skins bled,
And men grew glad, forgetting every care.
But first a golden chain and mantle fair 304
Pelias did on him ; and then, standing up,
Poured out red wine from a great golden cup,
Unto the Gods, and prayed to them : ‘ O ye
Who rule the world, grant us felicity
This hour, at least, nor let our sweet delight
Be marred by aught, until the silent night
Has come, and turned to day again, and we
Wake up once more to joy or misery, 312
Or death itself, if so it pleaseth you :
Is this thing, then, so great a thing to do ? ’

Thereon folk shouted, and the pipes again
Breathed through the hall a sweet heart-softening
strain,

And up the hall came lovely damsels, dressed
 In gowns of green, who unto every guest
 Gave a rose garland, nor yet hasted they,
 When this was done, to pass too quick away,
 If here and there an eager hand still held ³²¹
 By gown or wrist, whom the young prince beheld
 With longing eyes that roved about the hall.

Now longer did the cool grey shadows fall,
 And faster drew the sun unto the west,
 And in the field the husbandman, opprest
 With twelve hours' labour, turned unto his home,
 And to the fold the woolly sheep were come ;
 And in the hall the folk began to tell
 Stories of men of old, who bore them well, ³³⁰
 And piteous tales. And Jason in mean while
 Sat listening as his uncle, with a smile,
 Kept pouring many a thing into his ears,
 Now worthy laughter, and now meet for tears.
 Until at last, when twilight was nigh gone,
 And dimly through the place the gold outshone,
 He bade them bring in torches, and while folk
 Blinked on the glare that through the pillars broke,
 He said to Jason : ' Yet have I to tell ³³⁹
 One tale I would that these should hear as well
 As you, O Prince.' And therewith did he call
 The herald, bidding him throughout the hall
 Cry silence for the story of the king.

And this being done, and all men listening,
 He rose and said, ' O noble Minyæ,
 Right prosperous and honoured may ye be ;
 When Athamas ruled over Thebes the great,
 Upon his house there fell a heavy fate,
 Making his name a mere byword ; for he,
 Being wedded to the noble Nephele, 350

Gat on her a bold youth and tender maid,
 Phryxus and Helle ; but, being naught afraid
 Of what the righteous Gods might do to him,
 And seeing Ino, fair of face and limb
 Beyond all other, needs with her must wed,
 And to that end drove from his royal bed
 Unhappy Nephele, who now must be
 A slave, where once she governed royally ;
 While white-foot Ino smiling sat alone
 By Athamas upon the ivory throne. 360

And now, as time went on, did Ino bear
 To Athamas two children hale and fair ,
 Therefore, the more increased her enmity
 Against those two erst born of Nephele,
 Who yet, in spite of all things, day by day
 Grew lovelier as their sad lives wore away ;
 Till Ino thought, " What help will it have been,
 That through these years I have been called a
 queen,

And set gold raiment on my children dear,
 If Athamas should die and leave me here 370
 Betwixt the people and this Nephele,
 With those she bore ? What then could hap
 to me

But death or shame ? for then, no doubt,
 would reign
 Over this mighty town the children twain ;
 With her who once was queen still standing
 near,

And whispering fell words in her darlings' ear.
 And then what profit would it be that they
 Have won through me full many an evil day ;
 That Phryxus base and servile deeds doth know,

351 bold] fair 359 While the white-footed Ino sat alone
 366 lovelier] fairer

Unmeet for lords ; that many a shame and
 ' woe, 380

Helle has borne, and yet is wont to stand,
 Shrinking with fear, before some dreaded hand ;
 If still the ending of it must be this,
 That I must die while they live on in bliss,
 And cherish her that first lay in my bed ?
 Nor is there any help till they be dead."

' Then did she fall on many an evil thought,
 And going thence, with threats and money
 brought

The women of the land to do this thing :
 In the mid-winter, yea, before the spring
 Was in men's minds, they took the good seed
 corn, 391

And while their husbands toiled in the dark
 morn,
 And dreaded naught, they throughly seethed it
 all ;

Whereby this seeming portent did befall,
 That neither the sweet showers of April tide,
 Nor the May sunshine, gleaming far and wide
 Over the meadows, made their furrows green,
 Nor yet in June was any young shoot seen.

Then drew the country folk unto the king,
 Weeping and wailing, telling of the thing,
 And praying him to satisfy the God, 401
 Whoe'er he was, who with this cruel rod
 So smote his wretched people : whereon he
 Bade all his priests inquire solemnly
 What thing had moved the Gods to slay them
 thus ?

Who, hearing all this story piteous,
 Because their hands had felt Queen Ino's gold,
 And itched for more, this thing in answer told :—

That great Diana with Queen Nephele
 Was wroth beyond all measure, for that she,
 Being vowed unto the Goddess, none the less
 Cast by the quiver and the girt-up dress,
 To wed with Athamas, the mighty king. 413
 Therefore must she pay forfeit for the thing,
 And though she still should keep her wretched
 life,

Yet must she give her children to the knife,
 Or else this dearth should be but happiness
 To what should come, for she would so oppress
 The land of Thebes, that folk who saw its name
 In old records, would turn the page, and blame
 The chronicler for telling empty lies, 421
 And mingling fables with his histories.

Therefore is Athamas a wretched man
 To hear this tale, and doeth what he can
 To save his flesh and blood, but all in vain ;
 Because the people, cruel in their pain,
 With angry words were thronging the great hall,
 And crafty Ino at his feet did fall,
 Saying, "Oh, King, I pray for these, and me,
 And for my children." Therefore, mournfully
 He called the priests again, and bade them say,
 In few words, how his children they would slay,
 And when the dreadful bearer of the bow
 Would best be pleased to see their young blood
 flow. 434

Who said, "that if the thing were quickly done,
 Seeing the green things were not wholly gone,
 The ruined fields might give a little food,
 And that high noon-tide the next day was good,
 Above all other hours, to do the thing ;"
 And thereupon they prayed unto the king,
 To take the younglings, lest, being fled away,

They still might live and leave an evil day
To Thebes and all its folk henceforth to bear.

Then men were sent, who by the river fair
Found Phryxus casting nets into the stream,
Who, seeing them coming, little harm did deem
They meant him, and with welcome bade them
share

The glittering heap of fishes that lay there.
But they with laughter fell at once on him,
Who, struggling wrathfully, broke here a limb
And there a head, but lastly on the ground
Being felled by many men, was straightly
bound,

45²

And in an iron-bolted prison laid,
While to the house they turned to seek the
maid.

Whom soon they found, within the weaving-
room,

Bent earnestly above the rattling loom,
Working not like a king's child, but a slave
Who strives her body from the scourge to save.
On her they seized, speechless for very fear,
And dragged her trembling to the prison drear,
Where lay her brother, and there cast her in,
Giddy and fainting, wondering for what sin
She suffered this ; but, finding Phryxus laid
In the same dismal place, the wretched maid
Bewailed with him the sorrows of their life,
Praying the Gods to show the king's new wife
What sorrow was, nor let her hair grow grey
Ere in some hopeless place her body lay.

Now in that court a certain beast there was,
The gift of Neptune to King Athamas, 47⁰
A mighty ram, greater than such beasts be
In any land about the Grecian sea ;

And in all else a wonder to men's eyes,
 For from his shoulders did two wings arise.
 That seemed as they were wrought of beaten
 gold,

And all his fleece was such as in no fold
 The shepherd sees, for all was gold indeed.
 And now this beast with dainty grass to feed,
 The task of Nephele had late been made,
 Who, nothing of the mighty ram afraid, 480
 Would bring him flowering trefoil day by day,
 And comb his fleece; and her the ram would pay
 With gentle bleatings, and would lick her hand,
 As in his well-built palace he did stand.
 For all the place was made of polished wood,
 Studded with gold; and, when he thought it
 good,

Within a little meadow could he go,
 Throughout the midst whereof a stream did flow
 And at the corners stood great linden-trees,
 Hummed over by innumerable bees. 490

'So on the morning when these twain should
 die,

Stole Nephele to this place quietly
 And loosed the ram, and led him straight away
 Unto Diana's temple, where that day
 Her heart should break unless the Gods were
 good.

There with the ram, close in a little wood,
 She hid herself a-nigh the gates, till noon
 Should bring those to the Lady of the Moon
 She longed to see; and as the time drew nigh,
 She knelt, and with her trembling hands did tie
 About the gold beast's neck a mystic thing,
 And in his ears, meanwhile, was murmuring

489 And at the corners were there great lime-trees,

Words taught her by the ever-changing God,
 Who on the sands at noon is wont to nod
 Beside the flock of Neptune ; till at last
 Upon the breeze the sound of flutes went past ;
 Then sore she trembled, as she held the beast
 By the two golden horns, but never ceased
 Her mystic rhyme ; and louder, and more loud
 The music sounded, till the solemn crowd 510
 Along the dusty road came full in sight.

First went the minstrels, clad in raiment white,
 Both men and maids garlanded daintily ;
 And then ten damsels, naked from the knee,
 Who in their hands bare bows done round with
 leaves,

And arrows at their backs in goodly sheaves,
 Gaudily feathered, ready for the strife ;
 Then came three priests, whereof one bore the
 knife,

One a great golden bowl to hold the blood,
 And one a bundle of some sacred wood ; 520
 And then was left a little vacant space,
 And then came gold, and therewithal the face
 Of beauteous Ino, flushed and triumphing,
 And by her, moody and downcast, the king.

‘And now her heart beat quick and fast indeed,
 Because the two came, doomed that day to bleed
 Over the grey bark of the hallowed wood,
 Of whom went Phryxus in most manly mood,
 Looking around, with mournful, steady eyes,
 Upon the green fields and the braveries, 530
 And all he never thought to see again.
 But Helle, as she went, could not refrain
 From bitter wailing for the days gone by,

522 therewithal] she could see

527 This line was not in the first edition.

When hope was mixed with certain misery ;
 And, when the long day's task and fear was done,
 She might take pleasure sometimes in the sun,
 Whose rays she saw now glittering on the knife
 That in a little time should end her life.

' Now she, who in coarse raiment had been clad
 For many a year, upon her body had, 540
 On this ill day, a golden pearl-wrought gown,
 And on her drooping head a glittering crown,
 And jewelled sandals on her fainting feet,
 And on her neck and bosom jewels meet
 For one who should be wedded to a king ;
 Thus to her death went moaning this sweet
 thing. 546

' But when they drew a-nigh the temple gate
 The trembling, weeping mother, laid in wait,
 Let go the mighty beast upon the throng,—
 Like as a hunter holds the gazehound long,
 Until the great buck stalks from out the herd,
 And then, with well-remembered hunting word,
 Slips the stout leash,—so did she slip the beast,
 Who dashed aside both singing-man and priest,
 And girded maiden, and the startled king,
 And Ino, grown all pale to see the thing,
 With rising horror in her evil heart.
 And thereon Phryxus, seeing the close crowd
 part,
 And this deliverer nigh him, with wings spread
 Ready for flight, and eager threatening head,
 Without more words, upon his broad back
 sprung, 561
 And drew his sister after him, who clung
 With trembling arms about him ; and straight-
 way

538 should] would

558 the close crowd] the crowd

They turned unto the rising of the day,
 And over all rose up into the air
 With sounding wings ; nor yet did any dare,
 As fast they flew, to bend on them a bow,
 Thinking some God had surely willed it so.

‘ Then went the king unto his house again,
 And Ino with him, downcast that the twain
 Had so escaped her, waiting for what fate 571
 Should bring upon her doomed head, soon or
 late.

‘ Nor long she waited ; for, one evil day,
 Unto the king her glittering gold array
 And rosy flesh, half seen through raiment thin,
 Seemed like the many-spotted leopard’s skin ;
 And her fair hands and feet like armed paws,
 The treacherous beast across the strained throat
 draws

Of some poor fawn ; and when he saw her go
 Across the hall, her footsteps soft and slow
 And the lithe motion of her body fair 581
 But made him think of some beast from his lair
 Stolen forth at the beginning of the night.

‘ Therefore with fear and anger at the sight
 He shook, being maddened by some dreadful
 God ;

And stealthily about the place he trod,
 Seeking his sword ; and, getting it to hand,
 With flaming eyes and foaming mouth did stand
 Awhile, then rushed at Ino as she stood
 Trembling, with cheeks all drained of rosy
 blood ; 590

Who straightway caught her raiment up, and
 fled

Adown the streets, where once she had been led

In triumph by the man whose well-known cheer
Close at her heels, now struck such deadly fear
Into her heart, the forge of many a woe.

' So, full of anguish, panting did she go
O'er rough and smooth, till field and wood were
passed,

And on the border of the sea at last,
With raiment torn and unshod feet, she stood,
Reddening the flowering sea-pink with her blood.

' But when she saw the tireless hunter nigh,
All wild and shouting, with a dreadful cry
She stretched her arms out seaward, and sprung
down 603

Over the cliff among the seaweed brown
And washing surf, neither did any one
See aught of her again beneath the sun.

' But Athamas, being come to where she stood,
Stared vacantly awhile upon the blood,
Then, looking seaward, drew across his eyes
His fevered hand ; and thronging memories
Came thick upon him, until dreamily 611
He turned his back upon the hungry sea,
And cast his sword down ; and so, weaponless,
Went back, half-waking to his sore distress.

' As for the twain,—perched on that dizzy
height,
The white-walled city faded from their sight,
And many another place that well they knew ;
And over woods and meadows still they flew ;
And to the husbandmen seemed like a flame
Blown 'twixt the earth and the sky ; until they
came 620

Unto the borders of the murmuring sea.

Nor stayed they yet, but flew unceasingly,
 Till, looking back, seemed Pelion like a cloud ;
 And they beheld the white-topped billows crowd
 Unto the eastward, 'neath the following wind.

And there a wretched end did Helle find
 Unto her life ; for when she did behold,
 So far beneath, the deep green sea and cold,
 She shut her eyes for horror of the sight,
 Turning the sunny day to murk midnight,
 Through which there floated many an awful
 thing, 631

Made vocal by the ceaseless murmuring
 Beneath her feet ; till a great gust of wind
 Caught the beast's wings and swayed him round ;
 then, blind,

Dizzy, and fainting, did she grow too weak
 To hold her place, though still her hands did seek
 Some stay by catching at the locks of gold ;
 And as she fell her brother strove to hold
 Her jewelled girdle, but the treacherous zone
 Broke in his hand, and he was left alone 640
 Upon the ram, that, as a senseless thing,
 Still flew on toward the east, no whit heeding
 His shouts and cries ; but Helle, as she fell
 Down through the depths, the sea-folk guarded
 well,

And kept her body dead, from scar or wound,
 And laid it, in her golden robes enwound,
 Upon the south side of the murmuring strait,
 That still, in memory of her piteous fate,
 Bears her sweet name ; her, in a little while,
 The country folk beheld, and raised a pile 650
 Of beech and oak, with scented things around,
 And, lifting up the poor corpse from the ground,
 635 did she grow] grew her limbs 636 her] their

Laid it thereon, and there did everything,
As for the daughter of a mighty king.

‘ But through the straits passed Phryxus, sad
enow,

And fearful of the wind that by his brow
Went shrieking, as, without all stop or stay,
The golden wings still bore him on his way
Above the unlucky waves of that ill sea 659
That foamed beneath his feet unceasingly.
Nor knew he to what land he was being borne,
Whether he should be set, unarmed, forlorn,
In darksome lands, among unheard-of things,
Or, stepping off from ’twixt the golden wings,
Should set foot in some happy summer isle,
Whereon the kind unburning sun doth smile
For ever, and that knows no frost or drought ;
Or else, it seemed to him, he might be brought
Unto green forests where the wood-nymphs play
With their wild mates, and fear no coming day.
And there might he forget both crown and sword,
And e’en the names of slave, and king, and lord,
And lead a merry life, till all was done, 673
And ’mid the green boughs, marked by no carved
stone,

His unremembered bones should waste away,
In dew, and rain, and sunshine, day by day.

‘ So, ’mid these thoughts, still clinging fearfully
Unto his dizzy seat, he passed the sea,
And reached a river opening into it,
Across the which the white-winged fowl did flit
From cliff to cliff, and on the sandy bar 681
The fresh waves and the salt waves were at war,
At turning of the tide. Forth flew they then,
Till they drew nigh a strange abode of men,

Far up the river, white-walled, fair, and great,
 And at each end of it a brazen gate,
 Wide open through the daylight, guarded well;
 And nothing of its name could Phryxus tell,
 But hoped the beast would stop, for to his eyes
 The place seemed fair; nor fell it otherwise.
 There stayed theram his course, and lighted down
 Anigh the western gate of that fair town,
 And on the hard way Phryxus joyfully 693
 Set foot, full dizzy with the murmuring sea,
 Numbed by the cold wind; and, with little fear,
 Unto the guarded gate he drew anear,
 While the gold beast went ever after him.

But they, beholding him so strong of limb,
 And fair of face, and seeing the beast that trod
 Behind his back, deemed him some wandering
 God, 700

So let the two-edged sword hang by the side,
 And by the wall the well-steeled spear abide.

But he called out to them, "What place is this?
 And who rules over you for woe or bliss?
 And will he grant me peace to-day or war?
 And may I here abide, or still afar
 Must I to new abodes go wandering?"

Now as he spake those words, that city's king
 Adown the street was drawing toward the gate,
 Clad in gold raiment worthy his estate, 710
 Therefore one said: "Behold, our king is here,
 Who of all us is held both lief and dear;
 Æetes, leader of a mighty host,
 Feared by all folk along the windy coast.
 And since this city's name thou fain wouldst
 know,

692 Anigh] Hard by 702 spear] spears
 709 toward] towards

Men call it Æea, built long years ago,
 Holpen of many Gods, who love it well.
 Now come thou to the king, and straightway tell
 Thy name and country, if thou art a man,
 And how thou camest o'er the water wan,
 And what the marvel is thou hast with thee ;
 But if thou art a God, then here will we 722
 Build thee a house, and, reverencing thy name,
 Bring thee great gifts and much-desired fame."

Thus spake he, fearful : but by this the king
 Had reached the place, and stood there won-
 dering

At that strange beast and fair man richly clad,
 Who at his belt no sort of weapon had :
 Then spoke he : " Who art thou, in what
 strange wain

Hast thou crossed o'er the green and restless
 plain 730

Unharvested of any ? And this thing,
 That like an image stands with folded wing,
 Is he a gift to thee from any God,
 Or hast thou in some unknown country trod,
 Where beasts are such-like ? Howsoe'er it be,
 Here shalt thou dwell, if so thou wilt, with me,
 Unless some God is chasing thee, and then,
 What wouldst thou have us do, who are but
 men,

Against the might of Gods ? "

Then answered he :

" O king, I think no God is wrath with me,
 But rather some one loves me ; for, behold,
 A while ago, just as my foe did hold 742
 A knife against my throat, there came this ram,
 Who brought me to the place where now I am

718 straightway] straightly

743 A knife] The knife

Safe from the sea and from the bitter knife.
 And in this city would I spend my life,
 And do what service seemeth good to thee,
 Since all the Gods it pleases I should be
 Outcast from friends and country, though alive;
 Nor with their will have I the heart to strive
 More than thou hast; and now as in such wise
 I have been saved, fain would I sacrifice 752
 This beast to Jove, the helper of all such,
 As false friends fail, or foes oppress too much.”
 “Yea,” said Æetes, “so the thing shall be
 In whatsoever fashion pleaseth thee;
 And long time mayst thou dwell with us in bliss,
 Not doing any service worse than this,
 To bear in war my royal banner forth,
 When fall the wild folk on us from the north.
 Come now this eve, and hold high feast with us,
 And tell us all of strange and piteous 762
 Thy story hath.”

So went he with the king,
 And gladly told unto him everything
 That had befallen him, and in a grove,
 Upon the altar of the Saving Jove,
 They offered up the ram the morrow morn
 That thitherward the Theban prince had borne.
 ‘And thenceforth Phryxus dwelt in Colchis
 long
 In wealth and honour, and being brave and
 strong, 770
 Won great renown in many a bloody fray,
 And still grew greater; and both night and day,
 Within his pillared house, upon the wall
 Hung the gold fell; until it did befall
 That in Æetes’ heart a longing grew
 To have the thing, yea, even if he slew

His guest to get it ; so, one evil night,
While the prince lay and dreamed about the
fight, 779

With all armed men was every entry filled,
And quickly were the few doorkeepers killed ;
And Phryxus, roused with clamour from his bed,
Half-armed and dizzy, with few strokes was dead.
And thus the king Æetes had his will,
And thus the GOLDEN FLEECE he keepeth still
Somewhere within his royal house of gold.

‘ And thus, O Minyæ, is the story told
Of things that happened forty years ago ;
Nor of the Greeks has there been any one
To set the Theban’s bones within a tomb,
Or to Æetes mete out his due doom ; 790
And yet, indeed, it seemeth unto me
That many a man would go right willingly,
And win great thanks of men and godlike fame,
If there should spring up some great prince of
name
To lead them ; and I pray that such an one,
Before my head is laid beneath a stone,
Be sent unto us by the Gods above.’

Therewith he ceased ; but all the hall did
move
As moves a grove of rustling poplar trees
Bowed all together by the shifting breeze, 800
And through the place the name of Jason ran,
Nor, ’mid the feasters, was there any man
But toward the hero’s gold-seat turned his eyes.
Meanwhile, in Jason’s heart did thoughts
arise
That brought the treacherous blood into his
cheek,

And he forgot his father, old and weak,
 Left 'twixt the fickle people of the land
 And wily Pelias, while he clenched his hand,
 As though it held a sword, about his cup.

Then, 'mid the murmuring, Pelias stood up
 And said : ' O, leaders of the Minyæ, 811
 I hear ye name a name right dear to me—
 My brother's son, who in the oaken wood
 Has grown up nurtured of the Centaur good,
 And now this day has come again to us,
 Fair faced and mighty limbed, and amorous
 Of fame and glorious deeds ; nowise content
 Betwixt the forest and the northern bent
 To follow up the antlers of the deer,
 Nor in his eyes can I see any fear 820
 Of fire, or water, or the cleaving sword.

' Now, therefore, if ye take him for your lord
 Across the sea, then surely will ye get
 Both fame and wealth, nor will men soon forget
 To praise the noble city whence ye came,
 Passing from age to age each hero's name.'

Then all stood up and shouted, and the king,
 While yet the hall with Jason's name did ring,
 Set in his hands a gleaming cup of gold,
 And said : ' O Jason, wilt thou well behold 830
 These leaders of the people, who are fain
 To go with thee and suffer many a pain
 And deadly fear, if they may win at last
 Undying fame when fleeting life is past ?
 And now, if thou art willing to be first
 Of all these men, of whom, indeed, the worst
 Is like a God, pour out this gleaming wine
 To him with whose light all the heavens shine,
 Almighty Jove.'

Then Jason poured, and said :
 ‘ O Jove, by thy hand may all these be led 840
 To name and wealth ! and yet, indeed, for me,
 What happy ending shall I ask from thee ?
 What helpful friends ? what length of quiet years ?
 What freedom from ill care and deadly fears ?
 Do what thou wilt, but none the less believe
 That all these things and more thou shouldst
 receive,

If thou wert Jason, I were Jove to-day.

‘ And ye who now are hot to play this play,
 Seeking the fleece across an unknown sea,
 Bethink ye yet of death, and misery, 850
 And dull despair, before ye arm to go
 Unto a savage king and folk none know,
 Whence it may well hap none of ye to come
 Again unto your little ones and home.

‘ And do thou, Pelias, ere we get us forth,
 Send heralds out, east, west, and south, and
 north.

And with them cunning men, of golden speech,
 Thy tale unto the Grecian folk to teach ;
 That we may lack for neither strength nor wit,
 For many a brave man like a fool will sit 860
 Beside the council board ; and men there are
 Wise-hearted who know little feats of war ;
 Nor would I be without the strength of spears,
 Or waste wise words on dull and foolish ears.

‘ Also we need a cunning artisan,
 Taught by the Gods, and knowing more than
 man,

To build us a good ship upon this shore.
 Then, if but ten lay hold upon the oar,
 And I, the eleventh, steer them toward the east,
 To seek the hidden fleece of that gold beast,

I swear to Jove that only in my hand 871
 The fleece shall be, when I again take land
 To see my father's hall, or the green grass
 O'er which the grey Thessalian horses pass.
 'But now, O friends, forget all till the morn
 With other thoughts and fears is duly born!'

He ceased, and all men shouted; and again
 They filled their cups, and many a draught did
 drain.

But Pelias gazed with heedful eyes at him,
 Nor drank the wine that well-nigh touched the
 brim 880

Of his gold cup; and, noting every word,
 Thought well that he should be a mighty lord,
 For now already like a king he spoke,
 Gazing upon the wild tumultuous folk
 As one who knows what troubles are to come
 And in this world looks for no peaceful home,—
 So much he dreaded what the Gods might do.

But Æson, when he first heard Pelias, knew
 What wile was stirring, and he sat afeard,
 With sinking heart, as all the tale he heard;
 But after, hearkening what his son did say,
 He deemed a God spoke through him on that
 day. 892

And held his peace; yet to himself he said:
 'And if he wins all, still shall I be dead
 Ere on the shore he stands beside the fleece,
 The greatest and most honoured man in Greece.'

But Jason, much rejoicing in his life,
 Drank and was merry, longing for the strife;
 Though in his heart he did not fail to see
 His uncle's cunning wiles and treachery; 900
 But thought, when sixty years are gone, at most,

Then will all pleasure and all pain be lost ;
 Although my name, indeed, be cast about
 From hall to temple, amid song and shout :
 So let me now be merry with the best.

Meanwhile, all men spoke hotly of the quest,
 And healths they drank to many an honoured
 man,
 Until the moon sank, and the stars waxed wan,
 And from the east faint yellow light outshone
 O'er the Greek sea, so many years ago. 910

BOOK III

The Argonauts called together.

Now the next morn, when risen was the sun,
 Men 'gan to busk them for the quest begun ;
 Nor long delay made Pelias, being in fear
 Lest aught should stay them ; so his folk did
 bear

News of these things throughout the towns of
 Greece,

Moving great men to seek the golden fleece.

Therefore, from many a lordship forth they
 rode,

Leaving both wife and child and loved abode,
 And many a town must now be masterless,
 And women's voices rule both more and less, 10
 And women's hands be dreaded, far and wide,
 This fair beginning of the summer-tide.

Now, all the folk who went upon this quest
 I cannot name, but fain would hope the best
 In men's remembrance ancient tales did keep
 Unto our time, letting the others sleep

In nameless graves—though, mayhap, one by one,

These grew to be forgotten 'neath the sun,
Being neither poor of heart, or weak of wit,
More than those others whose crowned memories
sit 20

Enthroned amid the echoing minstrelsy
Sung of old time beside the Grecian sea.

Howe'er it be, now clinging to the hem
Of those old singers, will I tell of them,
In weak and faltering voice, e'en as I can.

Now was the well-skilled Argus the first man
Who through the gates into Iolchos passed,
Whose lot in fertile Egypt first was cast,
The nurse of Gods and wonder-working men ;
His father's name was Danaus, who till then
Had held the golden rod above the Nile, 31
Feared by all men for force and deadly wile.

So he, being brought to Jason, said : ' O
King,

Me have the Gods sent here to do the thing
Ye need the most ; for truly have I seen,
'Twixt sleep and waking, one clad like a queen,
About whose head strange light shone gloriously,
Stand at my bed's foot, and she said to me :

" Argus, arise, when dawn is on the earth,
And go unto a city great of girth 40
Men call Iolchos, and there ask for one
Who now gets ready a great race to run
Upon a steed whose maker thou shalt be,
And whose course is the bitter trackless sea,—
Jason, the king's son, now himself a king ;—
And bid him hearken, by this tokening,
That I, who send thee to him, am the same

Who in the greenwood bade him look for fame
 That he desired little ; and am she
 Who, when the eddies rushed tumultuously 50
 About us, bore him to the river side :—
 And unto thee shall such-like things betide."

' Therewith she told me many a crafty thing
 About this keel that ye are now lacking,
 Biddling me take thee for my king and lord,
 And thee to heed my counsel as her word
 As for this thing. So if ye would set forth
 Before the winter takes us from the north,
 I pray you let there be at my commands
 Such men as are most skilful of their hands,
 Nor spare to take lintel, roof-tree, or post 61
 Of ash or pine, or oak that helpeth most,
 From whoso in this city lacketh gold ;
 And chiefly take the post that now doth hold
 The second rafter in the royal hall,
 That I may make the good ship's prow withal,
 For soothly from Dodona doth it come,
 Though men forget it, the grey pigeons' home.

' So look to see a marvel, and forthright
 Set on the smiths the sounding brass to smite,
 For surely shall all ye your armour need 71
 Before these close flower-buds have turned to
 seed.'

Then Jason gave him thanks and gifts enow,
 And through the town sought all who chanced
 to know

' The woodwright's craft, by whom was much
 begun,

Whilst he took gifts of wood from many an one,
 And getting timber with great gifts of gold,
 Spared not to take the great post used to hold

72 these close flower-buds] these flower-buds

The second rafter in the royal hall
To make the new ship's goodly prow withal.

So Argus laboured, and the work was sped
Moreover, by a man with hoary head, 82
Whose dwelling and whose name no man could
know,

Who many a secret of the craft did show,
And 'mid their work men gazed at him askance,
Half fearful of his reverend piercing glance,
But did his bidding ; yet knew not, indeed,
It was the Queen of Heaven, Saturn's seed.

Meanwhile came many heroes to the town —
Asterion, dweller on the windy down 90
Below Philæus, far up in the north ;
Slow-footed Polyphemus, late borne forth
In chariot from Larissa, that beholds
Green-winding Peneus cleaving fertile wolds ;
Erginus, son of Neptune, nigh the sea
His father set him, where the laden bee
Flies low across Mæander, and falls down
Against the white walls of a merchant town
Men call Miletus.

Behind him there came
The winner of a great and dreaded name, 100
Theseus, the slayer of the fearful beast,
Who soon in winding halls should make his feast
On youths and maidens ; and with him there rode
The king Pirithous, who his loved abode
Amid the shady trees had left that tide
Where fly the centaurs' arrows far and wide.

Black-haired was Theseus, slim, and still his
cheek
Lacked all but down, for yet he had to seek

The twisted ways of Dædalus the old :
 But long and twining locks of ruddy gold 115
 Blew round the face of the huge forest king,
 As carelessly he rode and feared no thing.

Great joy had Jason, gazing on the twain.
 Young though they were, and thought that not
 in vain

His quest should be, if such as these had will
 The hollow of his great black ship to fill.

Next, threading Argive ways and woody lanes,
 Came Nauplius, son of Neptune, to those plains,
 Crossing Anaurus dryshod, for his sire
 With threats and blows drove up the land-stream
 higher, 120

And sucked the sea-waves back across the sands ;
 With him came Idmon, mighty of his hands,
 But mightier that he was skilled to know
 The counsel of the God who bears the bow,
 His very father, who bore not to see
 Unloved, Cyrene wandering carelessly
 Beside Peneus ; Iolaus came
 From Argos, too, to win a deathless name ;
 And if thenceforth came any heroes more 125
 I know not, and their names have died of yore.

But from Arcadian forests came forth one
 Who like a goddess 'mid the rowers shone,
 Swift-running Atalanta, golden-haired,
 Grey-eyed, and simple ; with her white limbs
 bared,

And sandalled feet set firm upon the sand,
 Amid the wondering heroes did she stand
 A very maid, yet fearing not for aught ;
 For she, with many a vow, had dearly bought
 Diana's love, and in no flowery stead

Had borne to hear love-songs, or laid her head
 On any trembling lover's heaving breast ; 141
 Therefore of mortals was she loved the best
 By Her, who through the forest goes a-nights,
 And in return for never-tried delights,
 Has won a name no woman else can have.

Next through the gates his car Oileus drave,
 The Locrian king, red-haired, with fierce grey
 eyes

Wandering from right to left, as though some
 prize

He sought for in the rich Thessalian land ;
 Then Iphiclus beside the gates did stand, 150
 His kine at all adventure left at home,
 That on a doubtful voyage he might roam.

Admetus from the well-walled Pheræ came,
 Longing to add new glory to the fame
 Of him whose flocks Apollo once did keep,
 And then Echion, who would nowise sleep
 Amid Ephesian roses, or behold
 Betwixt gold cups and lovely things of gold
 The white limbs of the dancing-girl, her hair
 Swung round her dainty loins and bosom bare ;
 But needs must try the hollow-sounding sea,
 As herald of the heroes, nor was he 162
 Left by his brother Eurytus the strong.

Neither did Cæneus, the Magnesian, long
 Less than the others strange new lands to see,
 Though wondrous things were told of him,—
 that he,

Once woman, now was man by Neptune's aid,
 And thus had won a long-desired maid.

From nigh Larissa came Ætalides, 169
 Leaving a plain well-watered, set with trees,

158 lovely] dainty

That feeds much woolly sheep and lowing neat
 And knoweth well the dancing maiden's feet.
 Mopsus, like Idmon, knew of things to come,
 And had in Lipara a rocky home.
 Eurydamas, tired of the peaceful lake
 Of Xynias, was come for Jason's sake
 To lay his well-skilled hands upon the oar,
 Dealing with greater waves than heretofore.

Mencæti^{us}, son of Actor, from the land
 Where swift Asopus runs through stones and
 sand, 180

Bridged by the street of Opus, next was seen.
 Eribotes, who through the meadows green
 Would wander oft to seek what helpeth man,
 Yet cannot cure his lust, through waters wan
 To seek for marvels, cometh after him.
 Then a rich man, grown old, but strong of limb,
 Eurytion, son of Iras, leaveth now
 His husbandmen still following of the plough
 In the fat Theban meadows, while he goes,
 Driven by fate, to suffer biting woes. 190

From Cæchalia, Clyti^{us} the king,
 And Iphitus his brother, felt the sting
 That drives great men through woes to seek
 renown,

And left their guarded city, looking down
 From rocky heights on the well-watered plain.
 Right wise they were, and men say, not in vain
 Before Apollo's court they claimed to be
 The first who strung the fatal cornel tree,
 And loosed the twanging bowstring from the ear.

Then to the gate a chariot drew a-near, 200
 Wherein two brothers sat, whereof the one
 Who held the reins was mighty Telamon;
 And Peleus was the other's dreaded name.

And from an island both the heroes came,
 Sunny Ægina, where their father's hand
 Ruled o'er the people of a fruitful land ;
 But they now young, rejoicing in their birth,
 Dreamed not that, ere they lay beneath the
 earth,

Still greater heroes from their loins should come,
 The doomsmen of the Trojan's godlike home.

Fair Athens, and the olive groves thereby,
 Phalerus left, riding through deserts dry
 And rocky passes where no sweet birds sing ;
 And with him Butes, with the owl's wing
 Well-painted on his shield ; and he, at least,
 Came back no more to share the joyous feast
 And pour out wine for well accomplished days,
 Who, all besotted with the Syren's lays,
 Must leave his mates ; nor happier than he,
 Tiphys the pilot came, although the sea
 Dealt gently with the ship whose ashen helm
 His hand touched ; in the rich Boeotian realm
 He left outlandish merceries stored up
 With many a brazen bowl and silver cup
 His heirs should feast from in the days to come,
 When men he knew not, went about his home.

Next Phlias came, forgetful of the hill
 That bears his name, where oft the maidens fill
 Their baskets with the coal-black clustering
 grapes,

Far on in autumn, when the parched earth gapes
 For cool November rain and winter snow,
 For there his house stood, on the shaded brow.
 Of that fair ridge that Bacchus loves so well.

Then through the gates one with a lion's fell
 Hung o'er his shoulders, on a huge grey steed
 Came riding, with his fair Phoenician weed

Glittering from underneath the tawny hair,
 Who loosely in his dreadful hand did bear
 A club of unknown wood bound round with
 brass,

And underneath his curled black hair did pass
 A golden circlet o'erwrought cunningly
 With running beasts ; so folk knew this was he
 That in Amphytrion's palace first saw light,
 And whose first hour began with deadly fight,
 Alcmena's son, the dreadful Hercules ;
 The man whose shout the close Nemean trees
 Had stifled, and the lion met in vain :
 The ravisher of hell, the serpent's bane,
 Whom neither Gods nor fate could overwhelm.

Now was he come to this Thessalian realm
 To serve with Jason on the wandering seas. 251
 Half seeking fame, half wishing to appease
 The wrath of her who grudged him ease and rest,
 Yet needs must see him of all men the best.
 Laughing he went, and with him on each hand
 There rode a squire from the Theban land ;
 Hylas was first, whose sire, Theodamas,
 Had given him worthy gifts of gold and brass,
 And gold-wrought arms, that he should see no
 more

Glittering along the green Ismenian shore. 260
 With him Ephebus came, who many a year
 Had backed the steed and cast the quivering
 spear

In Theban meadows, but whose fathers came
 From Argos, and thereby had left their name.

So through the streets like Gods they rode,
 but he

Who rode the midmost of the glorious three
 O'ertopped them by a head ; and looking down

With smiling face, whereon it seemed no frown
 Could ever come, showed like the king of all.

Now coming to the palace, by the wall 270
 Sat Jason, watching while an armourer wrought
 A golden crest according to his thought ;
 And round about the heroes were at play,
 Casting the quoit : but on the well-paved way,
 With clanging arms, leapt down Alcmena's son
 Before the prince, and said : ' I who have won
 Some small renown, O Jason, in this land,
 Come now to put my hand within your hand
 And be your man, if wide report says true,
 That even now with cinnabar and blue 280
 Men paint your long ship's prow, and shave the
 oars

With sharpened planes ; for soothly, other shores
 I fain would see than this fair Grecian one,
 Wherein great deeds already I have done :
 And if thou willest now to hear my name,
 A Theban queen my mother once became,
 And had great honour ; wherefore some men say
 That in Amphytrion's bed my mother lay
 When I was gotten ; and yet other some
 Say that a God upon that night did come 290
 (Whose name I speak not), like unto the king,
 With whom Alcmena played, but nought witting.

Nor I, nor others know the certainty
 Of all these things ; but certes, royally
 My brother rules at Thebes, whom all men call
 Amphytrion's son, in whose well-peopled hall,
 Right little loved of him and his, I eat,
 Nor does he grieve to see my empty seat,

297-8 *One line only in first edition :*

Ever am I the least loved guest of all,

Though, since my name is Hercules, the man
Who owes me hatred hides it if he can. 322

‘ And now, O prince, I bid thee take my hand,
And hear me swear that till unto this land
Thou hast borne back the fleece across the sea
Thy liege-man and thy servant I will be.
Nor have I seen a man more like a king
Than thou art, of whom minstrel folk shall sing
In days to come when men sit by the wine.’

Then Jason said . ‘ A happy lot is mine !
Surely the Gods must love me, since that thou
Art come, with me the rough green plain to
plough 312

That no man reaps : yet certes, thou alone
In after days shalt be the glorious one
Whom men shall sing of when they name the
fleece,

That bore the son of Athamas from Greece,
When I and all these men have come to nought.’

So spake he ; but the great-eyed Juno brought
His words to nothing, stooping to behold
Jason’s fair head, whereon the locks of gold
Curled thick and close, and his grey eager eyes,
That seemed already to behold the prize 320
In far-off Colchis : like a God he stood,
No less than he that in the darksome wood
Slew the lake-haunting, many-headed beast.

But on that day the Minyæ held a feast,
Praising the Gods, and those that they had sent
Across the sea to work out their intent.

Yea, ere the night, greater their joyance grew,
For to the throng of heroes came there two,
In nowise worse than any of the best,—

Castor and Pollux, who thought not to rest
 In woody Lacedæmon, where the doves 331
 Make summer music in the beechen groves,
 But rather chose to hear the sea-fowl sing.

Their mother wedded Tyndarus the king.
 And yet a greater name their father had,
 As men deem ; for that Leda, all unclad,
 In cold Eurotas, on a summer morn,
 Bathed her fair body, unto whom was borne,
 Fleeing from seeming death, a milk-white swan,
 Whom straight the naked queen, not fearing
 man, 340

Took in her arms, nor knew she fostered Jove,
 Who rules o'er mortal men and Gods above.

So in the hall of Pelias, in their place
 The twain sat down ; and joy lit every face,
 When both their names the sweet-voiced herald
 cried.

But the next morn into the town did ride
 Lynceus and Idas, leaving far away
 Well-walled Messene where the kestrels play
 About the temples and the treasure-house.
 But of these twain was Idas valorous 350
 Beyond most men, and hasty of his blow ;
 And unto Lynceus would the darkness show
 That which he lacked ; and of all men was he
 The luckiest to find the privy
 Of gold or gems. And on the self-same day
 Came Periclymenes, who folk did say
 Had Proteus' gift to change from shape to shape.

Next from Tegea, where the long green grape
 Grows yellow in the dewy autumn night,
 There came Ancæus, stubborn in the fight. 360

Amphidamus and Apheus left the trees
 Where sing the wood-doves to their mistresses

In the Arcadian forests ; and where oft,
 If through the springing brake he treadeth soft,
 The happy hunter may well chance to see
 Beside a hidden stream some two or three
 Of tired nymphs, stripping the silken weed
 From off their limbs ; nor shall Actæon's meed
 Betide him there among the oaken trees. 369

Next came there Augeas, who at Elis sees
 On his fat plains the sheep, and kine, and beeves,
 Unnumbered as the rustling aspen leaves
 Beside the river : from the grassy plain
 Anigh Pellene, where the harvest wain
 Scatters the grazing sheep, Amphion came,
 In nowise skilled like him who bore his name,
 The deathless singer, but right wise in war.
 Then through the town there passed a brazen car
 Bearing Euphemus, who had power to go
 Dryshod across the plain no man doth sow.
 By Tenarus he dwelt, beside the sea, 381
 Anigh the temple of the deity
 Whose son he was, the Shaker of the earth.

Then came a fresh Ancæus, who had birth
 In woody Samos, of the self-same sire
 Whose heart white-footed Alta set on fire,
 As on the yellow sands at dawn she went.

Then Calydon the great a hero sent,
 The fair-haired Meleager, who became,
 In after-days, the glory of his name, 390
 The greatest name of the Ætolian land ;
 While yet on him fate laid her heavy hand,
 In midst of all his glory so raised up,
 Who nowise now dreaded the proffered cup
 Of life and death she held for him to drain,
 Nor thought of death and wishes wished in vain.

With him his uncle rode, Laocoon,
 No longer young, teaching his brother's son
 What 'longed to ruling men and unto war.

From Lacedæmon, Iphiclus afar 400
 Had travelled, till the rich embroidered weed
 His father Thestius gave him at his need
 Was stained with sun and dust, but still he came
 To try the sea and win undying fame.

Then came a man long-limbed, in savage weed,
 Arcas the hunter, to whose unmatched speed
 All beasts that wander through the woods are
 slow.

In his right hand he bare the fatal bow 408
 Of horn, and wood, and brass, but now unstrung,
 And at his back a well-closed quiver hung,
 Done round with silver bands and leopard's skin,
 And fifty deaths were hidden well therein
 Of men or beasts ; for whoso stood before
 His bended bow and angry eyes, no more
 Should see the green trees and the fertile earth.

Then came two brothers of a wondrous birth,
 Zetes and Calais, sons of Boreas ;
 For he beheld Erechtheus' daughter pass
 Along Ilissus, one bright windy day,
 Whom from amidst her maids he bore away
 Unto the hills of Thrace to be his bride. 421
 Now unto them this marvel did betide,
 Like men in all else, from anigh the head
 Of each sprung wings, wherewith at will they sped
 From land to land, 'midst of the pathless air.

Next from Magnesia did roan horses bear
 Phocus and Priasus, well skilled to cast
 The whistling dart ; then o'er the drawbridge
 passed

423 That like fair men in all else, from the head

Ætolian Palæmonius, who not yet 429
 Had seen men armed in anger, or steel wet
 With blood of aught but beasts, but none the less
 Was willing now to stand among the press
 Of god-like men, who, with the Minyæ,
 Were armed to bring the fleece across the sea.

Then came Asclepius, whom the far-darter
 Saved living from the lifeless corpse of her
 He once loved well, but slew for treason done,
 Fair-haired Coronis, whose far-seeing son 438
 He honoured much, and taught so many a thing,
 That first he knew how man may ease the sting
 Of sickening pain, because all herbs he knew,
 And what the best and worst of them could do.
 So many a bitter fight with death he had,
 And made the heart of many a sick man glad,
 And gave new life to many a man who seemed
 But dead already, wherefore people deemed
 When he was dead that he was God indeed,
 And on his altars many a beast did bleed.

Acastus, Pelias' son, from wandering 449
 Was come that self-same day unto the king,
 And needs must go with Jason on his quest,
 Careless of princely ease and golden rest.

Next Neleus, growing grey, forgetting not
 The double crime, had left the pleasant spot
 Where wan Alpheus meets the green sea waves,
 And twice a-day the walls of Pylos laves ;
 For he was fain to expiate the sin
 Pelias shared with him, long years past within
 Queen Juno's temple, where the brothers slew
 The old Sidero, crying out, who knew 460
 Then first the bitterness of such a cry

451 his] this

455 Where wan] Where the wan

As broke from Tyro in her agony
 When helpless, bound, within the brazen hall,
 She felt unthought-of torment on her fall.
 With none to pity her, nor knew what end
 The Gods unto such misery would send.
 So might Sidero feel, when fell on her
 Unlooked-for death and deadly, hopeless fear ;
 And in their turn must Neleus o'er the sea
 Go wandering now, and Pelias must be 470
 A trembling liar till death seizes him.

But now with Neleus, young but strong of limb,
 His wise, far-seeing offspring, Nestor, went,
 With eyes a little downward ever bent,
 Thinking of this and that which he had seen ;
 Who, when his youth was flourishing and green,
 Saw many feats of arms and ways of men,
 Yet lived so long to be well honoured, when
 In Troy the old the princes shared the spoil.

Next came Laertes to share grief and toil
 With these upon the sea ; yet had he not 481
 An easy land in Ithaca the hot,
 Though Bacchus loves the ledges of the land,
 And weighs the peasant in his sunburnt hand
 The heavy oozing bunches, in the time
 When frosts draw nigh in the rough northern
 clime.

Next whom came Almenus, of naught afraid,
 Well armed and hardy, whom a mortal maid
 Bore unto Mars, for he, new-come from Thrace,
 Beside Enipeus met her, and in chase 490
 He held her long, who vainly fled from him,
 Though light of foot she was, and strong of limb.

And last of all, Orpheus the singer came,
 The son of King Œager, great of fame,

Yet happier by much in this, that he
 Was loved by heavenly Calliope.
 Who bore him Orpheus on a happy day.
 And now, through many a rough and toilsome
 way,

Hither he came the Minyæ to please, 499
 And make them masters of the threatening seas,
 Cheering their hearts, and making their hands
 strong

With the unlooked-for sweetness of his song.

Now it was eve by then that Orpheus came
 Into the hall, and when they heard his name,
 And toward the high-seat of the prince he drew,
 All men beholding him the singer knew,
 And glad were all men there that he should be
 Their mate upon the bitter, tuneless sea.
 And loud they shouted, but Prince Jason said —
 ‘Now, may the Gods bring good things on thy
 head, 510

Son of Cæger, but from me, indeed,
 This gold Dædalian bowl shall be thy meed,
 If thou wilt let us hear thy voice take wing
 From out thine heart, and see the golden string
 Quiver beneath thy fingers. But by me
 First sit and feast, and happy mayst thou be.’

Then, glad at heart, the hero took his place,
 And ate and drank his fill, but when the space
 Was cleared of flesh and bread, he took his
 lyre

And sung them of the building up of Tyre, 520
 And of the fair things stored up over sea,
 Till there was none of them but fain would be
 Set in the ship, nor cared one man to stay
 On the green earth for one more idle day.

507 And glad they were, indeed, that he should be

But Jason, looking right and left on them,
Took his fair cloak, wrought with a golden hem,
And laid it upon Orpheus, and thereto
Added the promised bowl, that all men knew
No hand but that of Dædalus had wrought,
So rich it was, and fair beyond all thought.
Then did he say unto the Minyæ :—

531

‘ Fair friends and well-loved guests, no more
shall ye

Feast in this hall until we come again
Back to this land, well-guerdoned for our pain,
Bearing the fleece, and mayhap many a thing
Such as this god-like guest erewhile did sing,
Scarlet, and gold, and brass ; but without fail
Bearing great fame, if aught that may avail
To men who die ; and our names certainly
Shall never perish, wheresoe’er we lie.

540

‘ And now behold within the haven rides
Our good ship, swinging in the changing tides,
Gleaming with gold, and blue, and cinnabar,
The long new oars beside the rowlocks are,
The sail hangs flapping in the light west wind,
Nor aught undone can any craftsman find
From stem to stern ; so is our quest begun
To-morrow at the rising of the sun.
And may Jove bring us all safe back to see
Another sun shine on this fair city,
When elders and the flower-crowned maidens meet
With tears and singing our returning feet.’

550

So spake he, and so mighty was the shout,
That the hall shook, and shepherd-folk without
The well-walled city heard it as they went
Unto the fold across the thymy bent.

BOOK IV

The quest begun—The loss of Hylas and Hercules.

BUT through the town few eyes were sealed by
sleep

When the sun rose : yea, and the upland sheep
Must guard themselves for that one morn at least,
Against the wolf : and wary doves may feast
Unscared that morning on the ripening corn
Nor did the whetstone touch the scythe that
morn ;

And all unheeded did the mackerel shoal
Make green the blue waves, or the porpoise roll
Through changing hills and valleys of the sea.

For 'twixt the thronging people solemnly
The heroes went afoot along the way 11
That led unto the haven of the bay,
And as they went the roses rained on them
From windows glorious with the well-wrought
hem

Of many a purple cloth ; and all their spears
Were twined with flowers that the fair earth bears ;
And round their ladies' tokens were there set
About their helmets, flowery wreaths, still wet
With beaded dew of the scarce vanished night.

So as they passed, the young men at the sight
Shouted for joy, and their hearts swelled with
pride ; 21

But scarce the elders could behold dry-eyed
The glorious show, remembering well the days
When they were able too to win them praise,
And in their hearts was hope of days to come.

Nor could the heroes leave their fathers' home

Unwept of damsels, who henceforth must hold
 The empty air unto their bosoms cold, ²⁸
 And make their sweet complainings to the night
 That heedeth not soft eyes and bosoms white.
 And many such an one was there that morn,
 Who, with lips parted and grey eyes forlorn,
 Stood by the window and forgot to cast
 Her gathered flowers as the heroes passed,
 But held them still within her garment's hem,
 Though many a wingèd wish she sent to them.

But on they went, and as the way they trod,
 His swelling heart nigh made each man a god ;
 While clashed their armour to the minstrelsy
 That went before them to the doubtful sea.

And now, the streets being passed, they
 reached the bay, ⁴¹
 Where by the well-built quay long Argo lay,
 Glorious with gold, and shining in the sun.
 Then first they shouted, and each man begun
 Against his shield to strike his brazen spear ;
 And as along the quays they drew a-near,
 Faster they strode and faster, till a cry
 Again burst from them, and right eagerly
 Into swift running did they break at last,
 Till all the wind-swept quay being overpast,
 They pressed across the gangway, and filled up
 The hollow ship as wine a golden cup. ⁵²

But Jason, standing by the helmsman's side
 High on the poop, lift up his voice and cried :—
 'Look landward, heroes, once, before ye slip
 The tough well-twisted hawser from the ship,
 And set your eager hands to rope or oar ;
 For now, behold, the king stands on the shore
 Beside a new-built altar, while the priests

Lead up a hecatomb of spotless beasts, 60
 White bulls and coal-black horses, and my sire
 Lifts up the barley-cake above the fire ;
 And in his hand a cup of ruddy gold
 King Pelias takes ; and now may ye behold
 The broad new-risen sun light up the God,
 Who, holding in his hand the crystal rod
 That rules the sea, stands by Dædalian art
 Above his temple, set right far apart 68
 From other houses, nigh the deep green sea.

And now, O fellows, from no man but me
 These gifts come to the God, that, ere long years
 Have drowned our laughter and dried up our
 tears,

We may behold that glimmering brazen God
 Against the sun bear up his crystal rod
 Once more, and once more cast upon this land
 This cable, severed by my bloodless brand.'

So spake he, and raised up the glittering steel,
 That fell, and seaward straight did Argo reel,
 Set free, and smitten by the western breeze,
 And raised herself against the ridgy seas. 80
 With golden eyes turned toward the Colchian
 land,

Still heedful of wise Tiphys' skilful hand.

But silent sat the heroes by the oar,
 Harkening the sounds borne from the lessen-
 ing shore ;
 The lowing of the doomed and flower-crowned
 beasts,

The plaintive singing of the ancient priests,
 Mingled with blare of trumpets, and the sound
 Of all the many folk that stood around
 The altar and the temple by the sea.

So sat they pondering much and silently, 90
 Till all the landward noises died away,
 And, midmost now of the green sunny bay,
 They heard no sound but washing of the seas
 And piping of the following western breeze,
 And heavy measured beating of the oars :
 So left the Argo the Thessalian shores.

Now Neptune, joyful of the sacrifice
 Beside the sea, and all the gifts of price
 That Jason gave him, sent them wind at will,
 And swiftly Argo climbed each changing hill,
 And ran through rippling valleys of the sea ;
 Nor toiled the heroes unmelodiously, 102
 For by the mast sat great Eager's son,
 And through the harp-strings let his fingers run
 Nigh soundless, and with closed lips for a while ;
 But soon across his face there came a smile,
 And his glad voice brake into such a song
 That swiftlier sped the eager ship along.

' O bitter sea, tumultuous sea,
 Full many an ill is wrought by thee !— 110
 Unto the wasters of the land
 Thou holdest out thy wrinkled hand ;
 And when they leave the conquered town,
 Whose black smoke makes thy surges brown,
 Driven betwixt thee and the sun,
 As the long day of blood is done,
 From many a league of glittering waves
 Thou smilest on them and their slaves.

' The thin bright-eyed Phœnician
 Thou drawest to thy waters wan, 120
 With ruddy eve and golden morn
 Thou temptest him, until, forlorn,

Unburied, under alien skies
 Cast up ashore his body lies.
 ' Yea, whoso sees thee from his door,
 Must ever long for more and more ;
 Nor will the beechen bowl suffice,
 Or homespun robe of little price,
 Or hood well-woven of the fleece
 Undyed, or unspiced wine of Greece ; 130
 So sore his heart is set upon
 Purple, and gold, and cinnamon ;
 For as thou cravest, so he craves,
 Until he rolls beneath thy waves.
 Nor in some landlocked, unknown bay,
 Can satiate thee for one day.

' Now, therefore, O thou bitter sea,
 With no long words we pray to thee,
 But ask thee, hast thou felt before
 Such strokes of the long ashen oar ? 140
 And hast thou yet seen such a prow
 Thy rich and niggard waters plough ?

' Nor yet, O sea, shalt thou be cursed,
 If at thy hands we gain the worst,
 And, wrapt in water, roll about
 Blind-eyed, unheeding song or shout,
 Within thine eddies far from shore,
 Warmed by no sunlight any more.
 ' Therefore, indeed, we joy in thee,
 And praise thy greatness, and will we 150
 Take at thy hands both good and ill,
 Yea, what thou wilt, and praise thee still,
 Enduring not to sit at home,
 And wait until the last days come,
 When we no more may care to hold
 White bosoms under crowns of gold,

And our dulled hearts no longer are
Stirred by the clangorous noise of war,
And hope within our souls is dead,
And no joy is remembered.

160

‘ So, if thou hast a mind to slay,
Fair prize thou hast of us to-day ;
And if thou hast a mind to save,
Great praise and honour shalt thou have ;
But whatso thou wilt do with us,
Our end shall not be piteous,
Because our memories shall live
When folk forget the way to drive
The black keel through the heaped-up sea,
And half dried up thy waters be.’

170

Then shouted all the heroes, and they drove
The good ship forth, so that the birds above,
With long white wings, scarce flew so fast as
they.

And so they laboured well-nigh all the day,
And ever in their ears divine words rung,
For ’midmost of them still the Thracian sung
Stories of Gods and men ; the bitter life
Pandora brought to luckless men ; the strife
’Twixt Pallas and the Shaker of the Earth,
The theft of Bacchus, and the wondrous birth
Of golden Venus. Natheless, when the sun
To fall adown the heavens had begun,
They trimmed the sails, and drew the long oars
up,

182

And, having poured wine from a golden cup
Unto the Gods, gladdened their hearts with food ;
Then, having feasted as they thought it good,
Set hands upon the oars again, and so
Toiled on, until the broad sun, growing low,

Reddened the green sea ; then they held their hands

Till he should come again from unknown lands,

And fell to meat again, and sat so long 191

Over the wine-cups, cheered with tale and song.

That night fell on them, and the moon rose high,

And the fair western wind began to die,

Though still they drifted slowly towards the east ;

Then with sweet sleep the others crowned their feast,

But Tiphys and the leader of the rest,

Who watched till drew the round moon to the west,

And Jason could behold beneath her light,

Far off at first, a little speck of white, 200

Which, as the grey dawn stole across the sea,

And the wind freshened, grew at last to be

Grey rocks and great, and when they nigher drew,

The skilful helmsman past all doubting knew

The land of Lemnos ; therefore from their sleep

They roused their fellows, bidding them to keep

The good ship from that evil rocky shore.

So each man set his hand unto the oar,

And, striking sail, along the coast they crept,

Till the sun rose, and birds no longer slept ;

Then as they went they saw a sandy beach

Under the cliff, that no high wave could reach,

And in the rock a deep cave cut, whereby

A man was standing, gazing earnestly 214

Upon their ship, and shouting words that, tost

Hither and thither by the wind, were lost

Amid the tumbling of the ridgy sea :

Natheless, they deemed that he still prayed to be

Their fellow, and to leave those rocky shores ;
 Therefore, with backing of the ashen oars,
 They stayed the ship, and beckoned unto him
 To try the sea, if so be he could swim, ²²²
 Because, indeed, they doubted there might be
 A-nigh the place some hidden enemy ;
 Nor cared they much to trust their oaken keel
 Too near those rocks, as deadly as sharp steel,
 That lay upon their lee ; but with a shout
 He sprang into the sea, and beat about
 The waters bravely, till he reached the ship ;
 And clambering up, let the salt water drip ²³⁰
 From off his naked limbs, nor spoke he aught
 Until before the fair prince he was brought.
 But Jason, when he set his eyes on him,
 And saw him famished and so gaunt of limb,
 Bade them to give him food and wine enow
 Before he told his tale ; and still to row
 Along the high cliffs eastward, nor to stay
 For town or tower, or haven or deep bay.

Then being clothed and fed, the island man
 Came back to Jason, and his tale began :— ²⁴⁰

‘ O Lord, or Prince, or whoso thou mayst be,
 Great thanks I give thee ; yet, I pray, of me,
 Ask not my name, for surely ere this day
 Both name, and house, and friends have past
 away.

A Lemnian am I, who within the town
 Had a fair house, and on the thymy down
 Full many a head of sheep ; and I had too
 A daughter, old enough for men to woo,
 A wife and three fair sons ; of whom the first
 For love and gold had now begun to thirst :

238 tower, or haven] tower, haven

Full rich I was, and led a pleasant life, 251
Nor did I long for more, or doubt for strife.

Know that in Lemnos were the Gods well
served,

And duly all their awful rites observed,
Save only that no temple Venus had,
And from no altars was her heart made glad ;
Wherefore for us she wove a bitter fate,
For by her power she set an evil hate
Of man, like madness in each woman's heart,
And heavy sleep on us men, for our part, 260
From which few woke, or woke in time to feel
Against their throats the pitiless sharp steel.

But that there might be one to tell the thing,
Nigh dawn I woke, and turning, thought to cling
Unto the warm side of my well-loved wife,
But found naught there but a keen two-edged
knife.

So, wondering much, I gat me from the bed,
And going thence, found all the floor be-bled
In my son's sleeping place, and nigh the door
His body, hacked and hewn, upon the floor : 270
Naked he was, but in his clenched right hand
Held tufts of woman's hair. Then did I stand
As in a dream a man stands, when draws nigh
The thing he fears with such wild agony,
Yet dares not flee from ; but the golden sun
Came forth at last, and daylight was begun ;
Then trembling I took heart to leave at last
The lonely house, but, as I slowly passed
Into the porch, a dreadful noise I heard,
Nor shall I be again by aught so feared, 280
How long soe'er I live, as I was then,
Because that shout was worse than cries of men
Drunken with blood ; but yet as in a dream

I went to meet it, and heard many a scream
 From dying men ; but, as I gained the street,
 Men flying for their dear lives 'did I meet,
 And turned and fled with them, I knew not why,
 But looking back in running, could espy,
 With shrinking horror, what kept up the chase.

' Because, indeed, the old familiar place, 290
 From house-wall unto house-wall, was now filled
 With frantic women, whose thin voices shrilled
 With unknown war-cries ; little did they heed
 If, as they tore along, their flesh did bleed
 So that some man was slain, nor feared they now
 If they each other smote with spear or bow,
 For all were armed in some sort, and had set
 On head or breast what armour they might get ;
 And some were naked else, and some were clad
 In such-like raiment as the slam men had, 300
 And some their kirtles wore looped up or rent.

' So ever at us shafts and spears they sent,
 And through the street came on like a huge wave,
 Until at last against the gates they drave,
 And we gained on them, till some two or three,
 As still the others strove confusedly,
 Burst from the press, and, heading all the rest,
 Ran mightily, and the last men, hard pressed,
 Turned round upon them, and straightway were
 slain, 309

Unarmed and faint, and 'gan the crowd to gain
 Upon the fleeing men, till one by one
 They fell, and looked their last upon the sun ;
 And I alone was held in chase, until
 I reached the top of a high thymy hill
 Above the sea, bleeding from arm and back,
 Wherein two huntsmen's arrows lightly stack,
 Shot by no practised hands ; but nigh my death

I was indeed, empty of hope and breath.

‘ Yet, ere their changed hands could be laid
on me,

I threw myself into the boiling sea, 320
And they turned back, nor doubted I was dead ;
But I, though fearing much to show my head,
Got me, by swimming, to yon little beach,
And there the mouth of yon cave scarce could
reach,

And lay there fainting till the sun was high.

Then I awoke, and, rising fearfully,

Gat into the dark cave, and there have been,

How long I know not, and no man have seen ;

And as for food and drink, within the cave

Good store of sweet clear water did I have,

And in the nights I went along the beach 331

And got me shell-fish, and made shift to reach

Some few birds’ eggs : but nathless, misery

Must soon have slain me, had not the kind sea

Sent you, O lords, to give me life again ;

Therefore, I pray, ye may not wish in vain

For aught, and that with goods and happiness

The Father of all folk your lives may bless.’

Then said the prince : ‘ And be thou strong
of heart, 339

For, after all thy woes, shalt thou have part

In this our quest, if so thou willest it ;

But if so be that thou wouldst rather sit

In rest and peace within a fair homestead,

That shall some king give to thee by my head,

For love of me ; or else for very fear

Shall some man give thee what thou countest
dear.

‘ And if thou askest of us, know that we

Are children of the conquering Minyæ,
 And make for Colchis o'er the watery plain,
 And think we shall not fail to bring again 350
 The fleece of Neptune's ram to Thessaly.'

'Prince,' said the Lemnian, 'I will go with thee

Whereso thou wilt, neither have I will
 To wait again for ruin, sitting still
 Among such goods as grudging fate will give,
 Even at the longest, only while I live.'

Then Jason bade them bring him arms well
 wrought
 And robes of price ; and when all these were
 brought,
 And he was armed, he seemed a goodly man.

Meanwhile, along the high cliffs Argo ran
 Until a fresh land-wind began to rise, 361
 Then did they set sail, and in goodly wise
 Draw off from Lemnos, and at close of day
 Again before them a new country lay,
 Which when they neared, the helmsman Tiphys
 knew

To be the Mysian land ; being come thereto,
 They saw a grassy shore and trees enow,
 And a sweet stream that from the land did flow ;
 Therefore they thought it good to land thereon
 And get them water ; but, the day being gone,
 They anchored till the dawn anigh the beach,
 Till the sea's rim the golden sun did reach.
 But when the day dawned, most men left the
 ship, 373

Some hasting the glazed water-jars to dip
 In the fresh water ; others among these
 Who had good will beneath the murmuring trees

'To sit awhile, forgetful of the sea
 And with the sea-farers there landed three
 Amongst the best, Alcmena's godlike son,
 Hylas the fair, and that half-halting one, 380
 Great Polyphemus. Now both Hercules
 And all the others lay beneath the trees.
 When all the jars were filled, nor wandered far ;
 But Hylas, governed by some wayward star,
 Strayed from them, and up stream he set his face.
 And came unto a tangled woody place,
 From whence the stream came, and within that
 wood

Along its bank wandered in heedless mood.
 Nor knew it haunted of the sea-nymphs fair,
 Whom on that morn the heroes' noise did scare
 From their abiding-place anigh the bay : 391
 But these now hidden in the water lay
 Within the wood, and thence could they behold
 The fair-limbed Hylas, with his hair of gold,
 And mighty arms down-swinging carelessly.
 And fresh face, ruddy from the wind-swept sea :
 Then straight they loved him, and, being fain to
 have

His shapely body in the glassy wave,
 And taking counsel there, they thought it good
 That one should meet him in the darksome wood,
 And by her wiles should draw him to some place
 Where they his helpless body might embrace.

So from the water stole a fair nymph forth,
 And by her art so wrought, that from the north
 You would have thought her come, from where
 a queen 405

Rules over lands summer alone sees green ;
 For she in goodly raiment, furred, was clad,
 And on her head a golden fillet had,

Strange of its fashion, and about her shone
Many a fair jewel and outlandish stone. 410

So in the wood, anigh the river side,
The coming of the Theban did she bide,
Nor waited long, for slowly pushing through
The close-set saplings, o'er the flowers blue
He drew nigh, singing, free from any care ;
But when he saw her glittering raiment fair
Betwixt the green tree-trunks, he stayed a space,
For she, with fair hands covering up her face,
Was wailing loud, as though she saw him not,
And to his mind came old tales half forgot,
Of women of the woods, the huntsman's bane.

Yet with his fate indeed he strove in vain ;
For, going further forward warily, 423
From tree-trunk unto tree-trunk, he could see
Her ivory hands, with wrist set close to wrist,
Her cheek as fair as any God has kissed,
Her lovely neck and wealth of golden hair,
That from its fillet straggled here and there,
And all her body writhing in distress,
Wrapped in the bright folds of her golden dress.

Then forthwith he drew near her eagerly,
Nor did she seem to know that he was nigh,
Until almost his hand on her was laid ; 433
Then, lifting up a pale wild face, she said,
Struggling with sobs and shrinking from his
hand :—

' O, fair young warrior of a happy land,
Harm not a queen, I pray thee, for I come
From the far northland, where yet sits at home
The king, my father, who, since I was wooed
By a rich lord of Greece, had thought it good
To send me to him with a royal train, 441

425 ivory] lovely

But they, their hearts being changed by hope of gain,

Seized on my goods, and left me while I slept :
Nor do I know, indeed, what kind God kept
Their traitorous hands from slaying me outright ;
And surely yet, the lion-haunted night
Shall make an end of me, who erewhile thought
That unto lovelier lands I was being brought,
To live a happier life than heretofore. 449

‘ But why think I of past times any more,
Who, a king’s daughter once, am now grown fain
Of poorest living, through all toil and pain,
If so I may but live : and thou, indeed,
Perchance art come, some God, unto my need ;
For nothing less thou seemest, verily.
But if thou art a man, let me not die,
But take me as thy slave, that I may live.
For many a gem my raiment has to give,
And these weak fingers surely yet may learn
To turn the mill, and carry forth the urn 460
Unto the stream, nor shall my feet unshod,
Shrink from the flinty road and thistly sod.’

She ceased ; but he stooped down, and stammer-
ing said :

‘ Mayst thou be happy, O most lovely maid,
And thy sweet life yet know a better day :
And I will strive to bring thee on thy way,
Who am the well-loved son of a rich man
Who dwells in Thebes, beside Ismenus wan.’
Therewith he reached his hand to her, and she
Let her slim palm fall in it daintily ; 470
But with that touch he felt as through his blood
Strange fire ran, and saw not the close wood,
Nor tangled path, nor stream, nor aught but her
Crouching before him in her gold and fur,

With kind appealing eyes raised up to his,
And red lips trembling for the coming kiss.

But ere his lips met hers did she arise,
Reddening with shame, and from before his eyes
Drew her white hand, wherewith the robe of gold
She gathered up, and from her feet did hold,
Then through the tangled wood began to go,
Not looking round ; but he cared not to know
Whither they went, so only she was nigh.

So to her side he hurried fearfully, 484
She naught gainsaying, but with eyes downcast
Still by his side betwixt the low boughs past,
Following the stream, until a space of green
All bare of trees they reached, and there-between
The river ran, grown broad and like a pool,
Along whose bank a flickering shade and cool
Grey willows made, and all about they heard
The warble of the small brown river bird.
And from both stream and banks rose up a haze
Quivering and glassy, for of summer days
This was the chiefest day and crown of all.

There did the damsel let her long skirts fall
Over her feet, but as her hand dropped down,
She felt it stopped by Hylas' fingers brown,
Whereat she trembled and began to go 499
Across the flowery grass with footsteps slow,
As though she grew aweary, and she said,
Turning about her fair and glorious head :
' Soft is the air in your land certainly,
But under foot the way is rough and dry
Unto such feet as mine, more used to feel
The dainty stirrup wrought of gold and steel,
Or tread upon the white bear's fell, or pass
In spring and summer o'er such flowery grass
As this, that soothly mindeth me too much

Of that my worshipped feet were wont to touch,
 When I was called a queen : let us not haste
 To leave this sweet place for the tangled waste,
 I pray thee, therefore, prince, but let us lie
 Beneath these willows while the wind goes by,
 And set our hearts to think of happy things,
 Before the morrow pain and trouble brings .

She faltered somewhat as she spoke, but he
 Drew up before her and took lovingly
 Her other hand, nor spoke she more to him,
 Nor he to her awhile, till, from the rim 520
 Of his great shield, broke off the leathern band
 That crossed his breast, whether some demon's
 hand

Snapped it unseen, or some sharp, rugged bough
 Within the wood had chafed it even now :
 But clattering fell the buckler to the ground,
 And, startled at the noise, he turned him round,
 Then, grown all bold within that little space,
 He set his cheek unto her blushing face,
 And smiling, in a low voice said .

‘ O sweet,
 Call it an omen that this, nowise meet 530
 For deeds of love, has left me by its will.
 And now by mine these toys that cumber still
 My arms shall leave me.’

And therewith he threw
 His brass-bound spear upon the grass, and drew
 The Theban blade from out its ivory sheath,
 And loosed his broad belt's clasp, that like
 a wreath

His father's Indian serving-man had wrought,
 And cast his steel coat off, from Persia brought ;
 And so at last being freed of brass and steel,

Upon his breast he laid her hand to feel 540
 The softness of the fine Phœnician stuff
 That clad it still, nor yet could toy enough
 With that fair hand ; so played they for a space,
 Till softly did she draw him to a place
 Anigh the stream, and they being set, he said :
 ‘ And what dost thou, O love ? art thou afraid
 To cast thine armour off, as I have done,
 Within this covert where the fiery sun
 Scarce strikes upon one jewel of your gown ? ’

Then she spake, reddening, with her eyes cast
 down : 550
 ‘ O prince, behold me as I am to-day,
 But if o’er many a rough and weary way
 It hap unto us both at last to come
 Unto the happy place that is thine home,
 Then let me be as women of thy land
 When they before the sea-born goddess stand,
 And not one flower hides them from her sight.’

But with that word she set her fingers white
 Upon her belt, and he said amorously : 559
 ‘ Ah, God, whatso thou wilt must surely be,
 But would that I might die or be asleep
 Till we have gone across the barren deep,
 And you and I together, hand in hand,
 Some day ere sunrise lights the quiet land,
 Behold once more the seven gleaming gates.’

‘ O love,’ she said, ‘ and such a fair time
 waits
 Both thee and me ; but now to give thee rest,
 Here, in the noontide, were it not the best
 To soothe thee with some gentle murmuring
 song,
 Sung to such notes as to our folk belong ; 570
 Such as my maids awhile ago would sing

When on my bed a-nights I lay waking ? '
 ' Sing on,' he said, ' but let me dream of bliss
 If I should sleep, nor yet forget thy kiss.'
 She touched his lips with hers, and then began
 A sweet song sung not yet to any man.

' I know a little garden close
 Set thick with lily and red rose,
 Where I would wander if I might
 From dewy dawn to dewy night. 580
 And have one with me wandering.

' And though within it no birds sing,
 And though no pillared house is there,
 And though the apple boughs are bare
 Of fruit and blossom, would to God,
 Her feet upon the green grass trod,
 And I beheld them as before.

' There comes a murmur from the shore,
 And in the place two fair streams are,
 Drawn from the purple hills afar, 590
 Drawn down unto the restless sea ;
 The hills whose flowers ne'er fed the bee,
 The shore no ship has ever seen,
 Still beaten by the billows green,
 Whose murmur comes unceasingly
 Unto the place for which I cry.

' For which I cry both day and night,
 For which I let slip all delight,
 That maketh me both deaf and blind,
 Careless to win, unskilled to find, 600
 And quick to lose what all men seek.

' Yet tottering as I am, and weak,
 Still have I left a little breath
 To seek within the jaws of death
 An entrance to that happy place,

To seek the unforgotten face
 Once seen, once kissed, once reft from me
 Anigh the murmuring of the sea.' 608

She ceased her song, that lower for a while
 And slower too had grown, and a soft smile
 Grew up within her eyes as still she sung.
 Then she rose up and over Hylas hung,
 For now he slept ; wherewith the God in her
 Consumed the northern robe done round with fur
 That hid her beauty, and the light west wind
 Played with her hair no fillet now did bind.
 And through her faint grey garment her limbs
 seemed

Like ivory in the sea, and the sun gleamed
 In the strange jewels round her middle sweet,
 And in the jewelled sandals on her feet. 620

So stood she murmuring till a rippling sound
 She heard, that grew until she turned her round
 And saw her other sisters of the deep
 Her song had called while Hylas yet did sleep,
 Come swimming in a long line up the stream,
 And their white dripping arms and shoulders
 gleam

Above the dark grey water as they went,
 And still before them a great ripple sent.

But when they saw her, toward the bank they
 drew, 629

And landing, felt the grass and flowers blue
 Against their unused feet ; then in a ring
 Stood gazing with wide eyes, and wondering
 At all his beauty they desired so much.
 And then with gentle hands began to touch
 His hair, his hands, his closed eyes ; and at last
 Their eager naked arms about him cast,

And bore him, sleeping still, as by some spell,
 Unto the depths where they were wont to dwell;
 Then softly down the reedy bank they slid,
 And with small noise the gurgling river hid
 The flushed nymphs and the heedless sleeping
 man. 641

But ere the water covered them, one ran
 Across the mead and caught up from the ground
 The brass-bound spear, and buckler bossed and
 round,
 The ivory-hilted sword, and coat of mail,
 Then took the stream; so what might tell the
 tale,
 Unless the wind should tell it, or the bird
 Who from the reed these things had seen and
 heard? 648

Meanwhile, the ship being watered, and the day
 Now growing late, the prince would fain away;
 So from the ship was blown a horn to call
 The stragglers back, who mustered one and all,
 But Theban Hylas; therefore, when they knew
 That he was missing, Hercules withdrew
 From out the throng, if yet perchance his voice
 Hylas might hear, and all their hearts rejoice
 With his well-known shout in reply thereto;
 With him must Polyphemus likewise go,
 To work out the wise counsel of the fates,
 Unhappy, who no more would see the gates
 Of white-walled fair Larissa, or the plain 661
 Burdened by many an overladen wain.

For, while their cries and shouts rang through
 the wood,
 The others reached the ship, and thought it good
 To weigh the anchor, and anigh the shore,

With loosened sail, and run-out ready oar,
 To trim the ship for leaving the fair bay ;
 And therefore, Juno, waiting for that day,
 And for that hour, had gathered store of wind
 Up in the hills to work out all her mind, 670
 Which, from the Mysian mountains now let slip,
 Tearing along the low shore, smote the ship
 In blinding clouds of salt spray mixed with rain.

Then vainly they struck sail, and all in vain
 The rowers strove to keep her head to wind,
 And still they drifted seaward, drenched and
 blind.

But, 'mid their struggling, suddenly there
 shone

A light from Argo's high prow, and thereon
 Could their astonished, fearful eyes behold
 A figure standing, with wide wings of gold,
 Upright, amid the weltering of the sea, 681
 Calm 'midst the noise and cries, and presently
 To all their ears a voice pierced, saying - ' No
 more,

O Jove-blessed heroes, strive to reach the shore,
 Nor seek your lost companions, for of these
 Jove gives you not the mighty Hercules
 To help you forward on your happy way,
 But wills him in the Greek land still to stay,
 Where many a thing he has for him to do,
 With whom awhile shall Polyphemus go,
 Then build in Mýsia a fair merchant-town,
 And when long years have passed, there lay him
 down : 692

And as for Hylas, never think to see
 His body more, who yet lies happily
 Beneath the green stream where ye were this
 morn,

And there he praises Jove that he was born,
 Forgetting the rough world, and every care ;
 Not dead, nor living, among faces fair.
 White limbs, and wonders of the watery world.
 ' And now I bid ye spread the sail ye furled.
 And make on towards the straits while Juno
 sends 701
 Fair wind behind you, calling you her friends.'
 Therewith the voice ceased, and the storm was
 still,
 And afterward they had good wind at will.
 To help them toward the straits, but all the rest,
 Rejoicing at the speeding of their quest,
 Yet wondered much whence that strange figure
 came,
 That on the prow burnt like a harmless flame ;
 Yea, some must go and touch the empty space
 From whence those words flew from the godlike
 face ; 710
 But Jason and the builder, Argus, knew
 Whereby the prow foretold things strange and
 new,
 Nor wondered aught, but thanked the Gods
 therefore,
 As far astern they left the Mysian shore.

BOOK V

The death of Cyzicus—Phineus freed from the Harpies.

Now, driven by the oar, and feeling well
 The wind that made the fair white sail outswell,
 Thessalian Argo flew on toward the place
 Where first the rude folks saw dead Helle's face ;
 There, fearful of the darkness of the night,

Without the rocks they anchored till the light,
 And when the day broke, sped them through
 the straits

With oars alone, and through the narrow gates
 Came out into Propontis, where with oar
 And sail together, within sight of shore. 10
 They went, until the sun was falling down,
 And then they saw the white walls of a town,
 And made thereto, and soon being come anigh,
 They found that on an isle the place did lie,
 And Tiphys called it Cyzicum, a place
 Built by a goodly man of a great race,
 Himself called Cyzicus, Euzorus' son,
 Who still in peace ruled over many an one,
 Merchants and other, in that city fair.

Therefore, they thought it good to enter there,
 And going softly, with sails struck, at last 21
 Betwixt the two walls of a port they passed,
 And on the quays beheld full many a man
 Buying and selling, nigh the water wan.

So, as they touched the shore, an officer
 Drew nigh unto them, asking who they were ;
 And when he knew, he cried : ' O heroes, land,
 For here shall all things be at your command ;
 And here shall you have good rest from the sea.'
 Therewith he sent one to go speedily 30
 And tell the king these folks were landed there.

Then passed the heroes forth upon the fair
 Well-bulided quays ; and all the merchant folk
 Beholding them, from golden dreams awoke,
 And of the sword and clattering shield grew fain,
 And glory for awhile they counted gain.

But Jason and his fair folk passing these,
 Came to a square shaded about by trees,

13 and soon being] and being

Where they beheld the crowned king glorious
stand 39

To wait them, who took Jason by the hand
And led him through the rows of linden trees
Unto his house, the crown of palaces :
And there he honoured them with royal feast
In his fair hall, hung round with man and beast
Wrought in fair Indian cloths, and on soft beds,
When they grew weary, did they lay their heads.

But he, when on the morn they would away,
Full many a rich gift in their keel did lay,
And while their oars were whitening the green sea,
Within his temple he prayed reverently 50
For their good hap to Jove the Saving God.
Hapless himself that these had ever trod
His quiet land ; for, sailing all the day,
Becalmed at last at fall of night they lay ;
And lying there, an hour before midnight
A black cloud rose that swallowed up the light
Of moon and stars, and therefrom leapt a wind
That drave the Argo, tottering and blind,
Back on her course, and, as it died, at last
They heard the breakers roaring, and so cast
Their anchors out within some shallow bay,
They knew not where, to wait until the day.

There, as they waited, they saw beacons flame
Along the coast, and in a while there came
A rout of armed men thereto, as might seem
By shouts and clash of arms that now 'gan gleam
Beneath the light of torches that they bore.
Then could the heroes see that they from shore
Were distant scarce a bowshot, and the tide
Had ebbd so quick the sands were well-nigh
dried 70

Betwixt them and the foremost of the foe,

Who, ere they could push off, began to go
Across the wet beach, and with many a cry
The biting arrows from their bows let fly.
Nor were the heroes slow to make return,
Aiming where'er they saw the torches burn.

So passed the night with little death of men ;
But when the sky at last grew grey, and when
Dimly the Argo's crew could see their foes,
Then overboard they leapt, that they might close
With these scarce seen far-fighting enemies,
And so met man to man, crying their cries,
In deadly shock, but Jason, for his part, 83
Rushing before the rest, put by a dart
A tall man threw, and closing with him, drave
His spear through shield and breast-plate weak
to save

His heart from such an arm ; then straight he fell
Dead on the sands, and with a wailing yell
The others, when they saw it, fled away,
And gat them swiftly to the forest grey 90
The yellow sands fringed like a garment's hem,
Nor gave the seafarers much chase to them,
But on the hard sand all together drew.

And now, day growing, they the country knew
And found it Cyzicum, and Jason said :
' Fellows, what have we done ? by likely-head
An evil deed, and luckless, but come now,
Draw off the helmet from this dead man's brow
And name him.' So when they had done this thing
They saw the face of Cyzicus the king. 100

But Jason, when he saw him, wept, and said :
' Ill hast thou fared, O friend, that I was led
To take thy gifts and slay thee ; in such guise,
Blind and unwitting, do fools die and wise,

And I myself may hap to come to die
 By that I trusted, and like thee to lie
 Dead ere my time, a wonder to the world.
 But, O poor king, thy corpse shall not be hurled
 Hither and thither by the heedless wave,
 But in an urn thine ashes will I save, 110
 And build a temple when I come to Greece
 A rich man, with the fair-curled golden fleece,
 And set them there, and call it by thy name,
 That thou mayst yet win an undying fame.'

Then hasted all the men, and in a while,
 Twixt sea and woodland, raised a mighty pile,
 And there they burned him, but for spices sweet
 Could cast thereon but wrack from 'neath their
 feet,

And wild wood flowers and resin from the pine;
 And when the pile grew low, with odorous wine
 They quenched the ashes, and the king's they set
 Within a golden vessel, that with fret 122
 Of twining boughs and gem-made flowers was
 wrought

That they from Pelias' treasure-house had brought.
 Then, since the sun his high meridian
 Had left, they pushed into the waters wan,
 And so, with hoisted sail and stroke of oar,
 Drew off from that unlucky fateful shore.

Now eastward with a fair wind as they went,
 And towards the opening of the ill sea bent
 Their daring course, Tiphys arose and said:

'Heroes, it seems to me that hardihead
 Helps mortal men but little, if thereto 133
 They join not wisdom, now needs must we go
 Into the evil sea through blue rocks twain,
 No keel hath ever passed, although in vain

Some rash men trying it of old, have been
 Pounded therein, as poisonous herbs and green
 Are pounded by some witch-wife on the shore
 Of Pontus,—for these two rocks evermore ¹⁴⁰
 Each against each are driven, and leave not
 Across the whole strait such a little spot
 Safe from the grinding of their mighty blows,
 As that through which a well-aimed arrow goes
 When archers for a match shoot at the ring.

‘ Now, heroes, do I mind me of a king
 That dwelleth at a sea-side town of Thrace
 That men call Salmydessa, from this place
 A short day’s sail, who hidden things can tell
 Beyond all men ; wherefore, I think it well
 That we for counsel should now turn thereto,
 Nor headlong to our own destruction go.’

Then all men said that these his words were
 good, ¹⁵³
 And turning, towards the Thracian coast they
 stood,
 Which yet they reached not till the moonlit night
 Was come, and from the shore the wind blew
 light ;

Then they lay to until the dawn, and then
 Creeping along, found an abode of men
 That Tiphys knew to be the place they sought.
 Thereat they shouted, and right quickly brought
 Fair Argo to the landing-place, and threw
 Grapnels ashore, and landing forthwith drew
 Unto the town, seeking Phineus the king. ¹⁶³
 But those they met and asked about this thing
 Grew pale at naming him, and few words said ;
 Natheless, they being unto the palace led,
 And their names told, soon were they bidden in
 To where the king sat, a man blind and thin,

And haggard beyond measure, who straightway
 Called out aloud : ' Now blessed be the way
 That led thee to me, happiest of all 171
 Who from the poop see the prow rise and fall
 And the sail bellying, and the glittering oars ;
 And blessed be the day whereon our shores
 First felt thy footsteps, since across the sea
 My hope and my revenge thou bring'st with thee.'

Then Jason said : ' Hail, Phineus, that men
 call

Wisest of men, and may all good befall
 To thee and thine, and happy mayst thou live ;
 Yet do we rather pray thee gifts to give, 180
 Than bring thee any gifts, for, soothly, we
 Sail, desperate men and poor, across the sea.'

Then answered Phineus : ' Guest, I know
 indeed

What gift it is that on this day ye need,
 Which I will not withhold ; and yet, I pray,
 That ye will eat and drink with me to-day,
 Then shall ye see how wise a man am I,
 And how well-skilled to 'scape from misery.'

Therewith he groaned, and bade his folk to
 bring

Such feast as 'longed unto a mighty king, 190
 And spread the board therewith ; who straight
 obeyed,

Trembling and pale, and on the tables laid
 A royal feast most glorious in show.

Then said the king : ' I give you now to know
 That the Gods love me not, O guests ; therefore,
 Lest your expected feast be troubled sore,
 Eat by yourselves alone, while I sit here
 Looking for that which scarcely brings me fear

This day, since I so long have suffered it.' 199

So, wondering at his words, they all did sit
At that rich board, and ate and drank their fill;
But yet with little mirth indeed, for still
Within their wondering ears the king's words
rang,

And his blind eyes, made restless by some pang,
They still felt on them, though no word he said.

At last he called out 'Though ye be full fed,
Sit still at table and behold me eat,
Then shall ye witness with what royal meat
The Gods are pleased to feed me, since I know
As much as they do both of things below 210
And things above.'

Then, hearkening to this word,
The most of them grew doubtful and afeard
Of what should come; but now unto the board
The king was led, and nigh his hand his sword,
Two-edged and ivory-hilted, did they lay,
And set the richest dish of all that day
Before him, and a wine-crowned golden cup,
And a pale, trembling servant lifted up
The cover from the dish; then did they hear
A wondrous rattling sound that drew anear,
Increasing quickly: then the gilded hall 221
Grew dark at noon, as though the night did fall,
And open were all doors and windows burst,
And such dim light gleamed out as lights the
cursed,

Unto the torments behind Minos' throne:
Dim, green, and doubtful through the hall it
shone,

Lighting up shapes no man had seen, before
They fell, awhile ago, upon that shore.

203 wondering ears . . rang] ears . . . harshly rang,

For now, indeed, the trembling Minyæ 229
Beheld the daughters of the earth and sea,
The dreadful snatchers, who like women were
Down to the breast, with scanty coarse black
hair

About their heads, and dim eyes ringed with red,
And bestial mouths set round with lips of lead,
But from their gnarled necks there began to
spring

Half hair, half feathers, and a sweeping wing
Grew out instead of arm on either side,
And thick plumes underneath the breast did hide
The place where joined the fearful natures
twain. 239

Grey-feathered were they else, with many a stain
Of blood thereon, and on birds' claws they went.

These through the hall unheard-of shrieking
sent,

And rushed at Phineus, just as to his mouth
He raised the golden cup to quench his drouth,
And scattered the red wine, and buffeted
The wretched king, and one, perched on his head,
Laughed as the furies laugh, when kings come
down 247

To lead new lives within the fiery town,
And said: 'O Phineus, thou art lucky now
The hidden things of heaven and hell to know;
Eat, happy man, and drink.' Then did she
draw

From off the dish a goblet with her claw,
And held it nigh his mouth, the while he strove
To free his arm, that one hovering above,
Within her filthy vulture-claws clutched tight,
And cried out at him: 'Truly, in dark night

252 goblet a misprint; read gobbet as in first edition.

Thou seest, Phineus, as the leopard doth.'

Then cried the third : ' Fool, who would fain
have both

Delight and knowledge, therefore, with blind eyes
Clothe thee in purple, wrought with braveries,
And set the pink-veined marble 'neath thy throne;
Then on its golden cushions sit alone, ²⁶²
Harkening thy chain-galled slaves without sing-
ing

For joy, that they behold so many a thing.'

Then shrieked the first one in a dreadful
voice :—

' And I, O Phineus, bid thee to rejoice,
That 'midst thy knowledge still thou know'st
not this—

Whose flesh the lips, wherewith thy lips I kiss,
This morn have fed on.' Then she laughed again,
And fawning on him, with her sisters twain
Spread her wide wings, and hid him from the
sight, ²⁷¹

And mixed his groans with screams of shrill
delight.

Now trembling sat the seafarers, nor dared
To use the weapons from their sheaths half-
bared,

Fearing the Gods, who there, before their eyes,
Had shown them with what shame and miseries
They visit impious men : yet from the board
There started two, with shield and ready sword,
The Northwind's offspring, since, upon that day,
Their father wrought within them in such way,
They had no fear : but now, when Phineus knew,
By his divine art, that the godlike two ²⁸²
Were armed to help him, then from 'twixt the
wings

He cried aloud : ' O, heroes, more than kings,
Strike, and fear not, but set me free to-day,
That ye within your brazen chests may lay
The best of all my treasure-house doth hold,
Fair linen, scarlet cloth, and well-wrought gold.'

Then shrieked the snatchers, knowing certainly
That now the time had come when they must fly
From pleasant Salmydessa, casting off ²⁹¹
The joys they had in shameful mock and scoff.
So gat they from the blind king, leaving him
Pale and forewearied in his every limb ;
And, flying through the roof, they set them down
Above the hall-doors, 'mid the timbers brown,
Chattering with fury. Then the fair dyed wings
Opened upon the shoulders of the kings,
And on their heels, and shouting, they uprose,
And poised themselves in air to meet their foes.

Then here and there those loathly things did
fly ³⁰¹
Before the brazen shields, and swords raised
high,
But as they flew unlucky words they cried.

The first said : ' Hail, O folk who wander wide,
Seeking a foolish thing across the sea,
Not heeding in what case your houses be,
Where now perchance the rovers cast the brand
Up to the roof, and leading by the hand
The fair-limbed women with their fettered feet
Pass down the sands, their hollow ship to
meet.'

' Fair hap to him who weds the sorceress,' ³¹⁰
The second cried, ' and may the just Gods bless
The slayer of his kindred and his name.'

' Luck to the toilsome seeker after fame,'

The third one from the open hall-door cried,
 ' Fare ye well, Jason, still unsatisfied,
 Still seeking for a better thing than best,
 A fairer thing than fairest, without rest ; 318
 Good speed, O traitor, who shall think to wed
 Soft limbs and white, and find thy royal bed
 Dripping with blood, and burning up with fire ;
 Good hap to him who henceforth ne'er shall tire
 In seeking good that ever flies his hand
 Till he lies buried in an alien land ! '

So screamed the monstrous fowl, but now the
 twain
 Sprung from the Northwind's loins to be their
 bane,
 Drew nigh unto them ; then, with huddled wings,
 Forth from the hall they gat, but evil things
 In flying they gave forth with weakened voice,
 Saying unto them : ' O ye men, rejoice, 330
 Whose bodies worms shall feed on soon or late,
 Blind slaves and foolish of unsparing fate,
 Seeking for that which ye can never get,
 Whilst life and death alike ye do forget
 In needless strife, until on some sure day,
 Death takes your scarcely tasted life away.'

Quivering their voices ceased as on they flew
 Before the swift wings of the godlike two
 Far over land and sea, until they were 339
 Anigh the isles called Strophades, and there,
 With tired wings, all voiceless did they light,
 Trembling to see anigh the armour bright
 The wind-born brothers bore, but as these drew
 Their gleaming swords and towards the monsters
 flew,

From out the deep rose up a black-haired man,
Who, standing on the white-topped waves that
ran

On towards the shore, cried : ' Heroes, turn
again,

For on this islet shall ye land in vain,
But without sorrow leave the chase of these
Who henceforth 'mid the rocky Strophades
Shall dwell for ever, servants unto me, 351
Working my will ; therefore rejoice that ye
Win gifts and honour for your deed to-day.'

Then, even as he spoke, they saw but grey
White-headed waves rolling where he had stood,
Whereat they sheathed their swords, and
through their blood

A tremor ran, for now they knew that he
Was Neptune, shaker of the earth and sea ;
Therefore they turned them back unto the hall
Where yet the others were, and ere nightfall
Came back to Salmydessa and the king, 361
And lighting down they told him of the thing.

Who, hearing them, straight lifted up his
voice,
And 'midst the shouts cried : ' Heroes, now
rejoice

With me who am delivered on this day
From that which took all hope and joy away ;
Therefore to feast again, until the sun
Another glad day for us has begun,
And then, indeed, if ye must try the sea,
With gifts and counsel shall ye go from me ;
Such as the Gods have given me to give,
And happy lives and glorious may ye live.'

Then did they fall to banqueting again,
Forgetting all forebodings and all pain ;

And when that they had ate and drank enow,
 With songs and music, and a goodly show,
 Their hearts were gladdened, for before their eyes
 Played youths and damsels with strange fanta-
 • sies,

Clad as in Saturn's time folk used to be,
 With green leaves gathered from the summer
 tree, 380

When all the year was summer everywhere,
 And every man and woman blest and fair.

So, set 'twixt pleasure and some soft regret,
 All cares of mortal men did they forget,
 Except the vague desire not to die,
 The hopeless wish to flee from certainty,
 That sights and sounds we love will bring on us
 In this sweet fleeting world and piteous.

BOOK VI

The passage of the Symplegades—The heroes come to Ææa.

BUT on the morrow did they get them gone,
 Gifted with gold and many a precious stone,
 And many a bale of scarlet cloth and spice,
 And arms well wrought, and goodly robes of
 price.

But chiefly to the wind-born brothers strong
 Did gifts past telling on that morn' belong.

Now as they stood upon the windy quay,
 Ready their hands upon the ropes to lay,
 Phineus, who 'midst his mighty lords was there,
 Set high above them in a royal chair, 10
 Said : ' Many a gift ye have of me to-day
 Within your treasures at home to lay,

If so it be that through hard things and pain
 Ye come to the horse-nurturing land again ;
 Natheless, one more gift shall ye have of me,
 For lacking that, beneath the greedy sea,
 The mighty tomb of mariners and kings,
 Doubt not to lay down these desired things,
 Nor think to come to Thessaly at all.'

And therewith turning, he began to call 20
 Unto his folk to bring what they had there.
 Then one brought forward a cage great and fair,
 Wherein they saw a grey, pink-footed dove.

Then said the king : ' The very Gods above
 Can scanty help you more than now I do,
 For listen ; as upon this day ye go
 Unto the narrow ending of the sea,
 Anigh the clashing rocks lie patiently,
 And let the keenest-eyed among you stand
 Upon the prow, and let loose from his hand
 This dove, who from my mouth to-day has heard
 So many a mystic and compelling word, 32
 He cannot choose, being loosed, but fly down
 straight

Unto the opening of that dreadful gate ;
 So let the keen-eyed watch, and if so be
 He comes out safe into the evil sea,
 Then bend unto the oars, nor fear at all
 Of aught that from the clashers may befall ;
 But if he perish, then turn back again,
 And know the Gods have made your passage
 vain. 40

Thereafter, if ye will, come back to me,
 And if ye find nought in my treasury
 That ye desire, yet ye at least shall have
 A king and a king's son to be your slave ;
 And all things here still may ye bind and loose,

And from our women freely may ye choose,
Nor spare the fairest or most chaste to kiss,
And in fair houses shall ye live in bliss.'

'O king,' said Jason, 'know that on this day
I will not be forsworn, but by some way 50
Will reach the oak-grove and the Golden Fleece,
Or, failing, die at least far off from Greece,
Not unremembered; yet great thanks we give
For this thy gift and counsel, and will strive
To come to Colchis through the unknown land
And whatso perils wait us, if Jove's hand
Be heavy on us, and the great blue gates
Are shut against us by the unmoved fates.
Farewell, O king, and henceforth, free from ill,
Live happy as thou mayest, and honoured still.'

Then turned he, shouting, to the Minyæ, 61
Who o'er the gangways rushed tumultuously,
And from the land great Argo straightway thrust,
And gat them to their work, hot with the lust
Of fame and noble deeds, and happy prize.
But the bird Lynceus took, unto whose eyes
The night was as the day, and fire as air.

Then back into his marble palace fair
The king turned, thinking well upon the way
Of what had happed since morn of yesterday.

Now from the port passed Argo, and the wind
Being fair for sailing, quickly left behind 72
Fair Salmydessa, the kind, gainful place;
And so, with sail and oar, in no long space
They reached the narrow ending of the sea,
Where the wind shifted, blowing gustily
From side to side, so that their flapping sail
But little in the turmoil could avail;
And now at last did they begin to hear

The pounding of the rocks ; but nothing clear
 They saw them ; for the steaming clouds of spray,
 Cast by the meeting hammers every way, ⁸²
 Quite hid the polished bases from their sight ;
 Unless perchance the eyes of Lynceus might
 Just now and then behold the deep blue shine
 Betwixt the scattering of the silver brine ;
 But sometimes 'twixt the clouds the sun would
 pass

And show the high rocks glittering like glass,
 Quivering, as far beneath the churned-up waves
 Were ground together the strong arched caves,
 Wherein none dwelt, no, not the giant's brood,
 Who fed the green sea with his lustful blood,
 Nor were sea-devils even nurtured there, ⁹³
 Nor dared the sea-worm use them for its lair.

And now the Minyæ, as they drew anear,
 Had been at point to turn about for fear,
 Each man beholding his pale fellow's face,
 Whose speech was silenced in that dreadful place
 By the increasing clamour of the sea
 And adamantine rocks ; then verily ¹⁰⁰
 Was Juno good at need, who set strange fire
 In Jason's heart, and measureless desire
 To be the first of men, and made his voice
 Clear as that herald's, whose sweet words rejoice
 The Gods within the flowery fields of Heaven,
 And gave his well-knit arm the strength of seven.
 So then, above the crash and thundering,
 The Minyæ heard his shrill, calm voice, crying :—
 ' Shall this be, then, an ending to our quest ?
 And shall we find the worst, who sought the best ?
 Far better had ye sat beside your wives, ¹¹¹
 And 'mid the wine-cups lingered out your lives,

Dreaming of noble deeds, though trying none,
 Than as vain boasters, with your deed undone,
 Come back to Greece, that men may sing of you.
 Are ye all shameless ?—are there not a few
 Who have slain fear, knowing the unmoved fates
 Have meted out already what awaits
 The coward and the brave ? Ho ! Lynceus !
 stand 119

Upon the prow, and let slip from your hand
 The wise king's bird ; and all ye note, the wind
 Is steady now, and, blowing from behind,
 Drives us on toward the clashers, and I hold
 The helm myself ; therefore, lest we be rolled
 Broadside against these horrors, take the oar,
 And hang here, half a furlong from the shore,
 Nor die of fear, until at least we know
 If through these gates the Gods will let us go :
 And if so be they will not, yet will we
 Not empty-handed come to Thessaly, 130
 But strike for Æa through this unknown land,
 Whose arms reach out to us on either hand.'

Then they for shame began to cast off fear,
 And, handling well the oars, kept Argo near
 The changing, little-lighted, spray-washed space
 Whereunto Lynceus set his eager face,
 And loosed the dove, who down the west wind
 flew ;

Then all the others lost her, dashing through
 The clouds of spray, but Lynceus noted how
 She reached the open space, just as a blow
 Had spent itself, and still the hollow sound
 Of the last clash was booming all around ;
 And eagerly he noted how the dove 143
 Stopped 'mazed, and hovered for a while above

The troubled sea, then stooping, darted through,
 As the blue gleaming rocks together drew ;
 Then scarce he breathed, until a joyous shout
 He gave, as he beheld her passing out
 Unscathed, above the surface of the sea,
 While back again the rocks drew sluggishly.

Then back their poised oars whirled, and
 straight they drave 151
 Unto the opening of the spray-arched cave ;
 But Jason's eyes alone, of all the crew,
 Beheld the sunny sea and cloudless blue,
 Still narrowing, but bright from rock to rock.

Now as they neared, came the next thunder-
 ing shock,
 That deafened all, and with an icy cloud
 Hid man from man ; but Jason, shouting loud,
 Still clutched the tiller ; and the oars, grasped
 tight
 By mighty hands, drave on the ship forthright
 Unto the rocks, until, with blinded eyes, 161
 They blinked one moment at those mysteries
 Unseen before, the next they felt the sun
 Full on their backs, and knew their deed was done.

Then on their oars they lay, and Jason turned,
 And o'er the rocks beheld how Iris burned
 In fair and harmless many-coloured flame,
 And he beheld the way by which they came
 Wide open, changeless, of its spray-clouds
 cleared ; 169
 And though in his bewildered ears he heard
 The tumult yet, that all was stilled he knew,
 While in and out the unused sea-fowl flew
 Betwixt them, and the now subsiding sea
 Lapped round about their dark feet quietly.

So, turning to the Minyæ, he cried :—
 ‘ See ye, O fellows, the gates opened wide,
 And chained fast by the Gods, nor think to miss
 The very end we seek, or well-earned bliss ¹⁷⁸
 When once again we feel our country’s earth,
 And ’twixt the tears of elders, and the mirth
 Of young men grown to manhood since we left,
 And longing eyes of girls, the fleece, once reft
 From a king’s son of Greece, we hang again
 In Neptune’s temple, nigh the murmuring main.’

Then all men, with their eyes now cleared of
 brine,
 Beheld the many-coloured rainbow shine
 Over the rocks, and saw it fade away,
 And saw the opening cleared of sea and spray,
 And saw the green sea lap about the feet
 Of those blue hills, that never more should meet,
 And saw the wondering sea-fowl fly about
 Their much-changed tops; then, with a mighty
 shout, ¹⁹²

They rose rejoicing, and poured many a cup
 Of red wine to the Gods, and hoisting up
 The weather-beaten sail, with mirth and song,
 Having good wind at will, they sped along.

Three days with good hap and fair wind they
 went,
 That ever at their backs Queen Juno sent,
 But on the fourth day, about noon, they drew
 Unto a new-built city no man knew; ²⁰⁰
 No, not the pilot; so they thought it good
 To arm themselves, and thus in doubtful mood
 Brought Argo to the port, and being come nigh,
 A clear-voiced herald from the land did cry :

196 they] then

‘ Whoso ye be, if that ye come in peace,
 King Lycus bids you hail, but if from Greece
 Ye come, and are the folk of whom we hear
 Who make for Colchis, free from any fear
 Then doubly welcome are ye, here take land,
 For everything shall be at your command.’

So without fear they landed at that word,
 And told him who they were, which when he heard,
 Through the fair streets he brought them to the
 king, 213

Who feasted them that night with everything
 That man could wish, but when on the next day
 They gathered at the port to go away,
 The wind was foul and boisterous, so perforce
 There must they bide, lest they should come to
 worse. 218

And there for fourteen days did they abide,
 And for their pastime oft would wander wide
 About the woods, for slaying of the beasts
 Whereby to furnish forth the royal feasts;
 But on a day, a closely-hunted boar,
 Turning to bay, smote Idmon very sore
 So that he died; poor wretch, who could foresee
 Full many an unknown thing that was to be.
 And yet not this, whose corpse they burnt with fire
 Upon a purple-covered spice-strewn pyre,
 And set his ashes in a marble tomb. 229
 Neither could Tiphys there escape his doom,
 Who, after suffering many a bitter storm,
 Died bitten of a hidden crawling worm,
 As through the woods he wandered all alone.
 Now he being burned, and laid beneath a stone,
 The wind grew fair for sailing, and the rest
 Bade farewell to the king, and on their quest
 Once more were busied, and began to plough

The unsteady plain ; for whom Erginus now,
Great Neptune's son, the brass-bound tiller held.

Now leaving that fair land, nought they beheld
For seven days but sea and changeful sky, ²⁴¹
But on the eighth, keen could Lynceus espy
A land far off, and nigher as they drew
A low green shore, backed up by mountains blue,
Cleft here and there, all saw. 'twixt hope and fear,
For now it seemed to them they should be near
The wished-for goal of Æa, and the place
Where in the great sea Phasis ends his race.

Then, creeping carefully along the beach,
The mouth of a green river did they reach, ²⁵⁰
Cleaving the sands, and on the yellow bar
The salt waves and the fresh waves were at war,
As Phryxus erst beheld them, but no man
Among them ere had sailed that water wan,
Now that wise Tiphys lay within his tomb.

Natheless they, wrapt in that resistless doom
The fates had woven, turned from off the sea
Argo's fair head, and rowing mightily ²⁵⁸
Drave her across the bar, who with straight keel
The eddying stream against her bows did feel.

So, with the wind behind them, and the oars
Still hard at work, they went betwixt the shores
Against the ebb, and now full oft espied
Trim homesteads here and there on either side,
And fair kine grazing, and much woolly sheep,
And skin-clad shepherds, roused from mid-day
sleep,

Gazing upon them with scared wondering eyes.
So now they deemed they might benear their prize ;

242 But on the eighth day could Lynceus espy

249 Then] So

And at the least knew that some town was nigh,
 And thought to hear new tidings presently,
 Which happed indeed, for on the turn of tide,
 At ending of a long reach, they espied 272
 A city wondrous fair, which seemed indeed
 To bar the river's course ; but, taking heed
 And drawing nigher, soon found out the case,
 That on an island builded was the place
 The more part of it ; but four bridges fair
 Set thick with goodly houses everywhere,
 Crossed two and two on each side to the land,
 Whereon was built, with walls on either hand,
 A towered outwork, lest that war should fall
 Upon the land, and midmost of each wall 282
 A noble gate ; moreover did they note
 About the wharves full many a ship and boat.
 And they beheld the sunlight glistering
 On arms of men and many a warlike thing,
 As nigher to the city they were borne,
 And heard at last some huge deep booming horn
 Sound from a tower o'er the watery way,
 Whose last loud note was taken up straightway
 By other watchers further and more near.

Now when they did therewith loud shouting
 hear, 292
 Then Jason bade them arm for what might come,
 'For now,' quoth he, 'I deem we reach the home
 Of that great marvel we are sworn to seek,
 Nor do I think to find these folk so weak
 That they with few words and a gift or two
 Will give us that for which they did forego
 Fair fame, the love of Gods, and praise of men ;
 Be strong and play the man, I bid you then,
 For certes in none other wise shall ye 301

291 other watchers] many another

Come back again to grassy Thessaly.'

Then loud they shouted, clean forgetting fear,
And strong Erginus Argo straight did steer
On to the port; but through the crowded waist
Ran Jason to the high prow, making haste
To be the first to look upon that throng.
Shieldless he was, although his fingers strong
About a sharpened brass-bound spear did meet,
And as the ashen oars swept on, his feet 310
Moved lightly to their cadence under him;
So stood he like a God in face and limb.

Now drawing quickly nigh the landing-place,
Little by little did they slack their pace,
Till half a bowshot from the shore they lay,
Then Jason shouted: 'What do ye to-day
All armed, O warriors? and what town is this
That here by seeming ye have little bliss
Of quiet life, but, smothered up in steel, 319
Ye needs must meet each harmless merchant keel
That nears your haven, though perchance it
bring

Good news, and many a much-desired thing
That ye may get good cheap? and such are we,
But wayfarers upon the troublous sea,
Careful of that stored up within our hold,
Phœnician scarlet, spice, and Indian gold,
Deep dying-earths, and woad and cinnabar,
Wrought arms and vessels, and all things that are
Desired much by dwellers in all lands; 329
Nor doubt us friends, although indeed our hands
Lack not for weapons, for the unfenced head,
Where we have been, soon rests among the dead.'

So spake he with a smiling face, nor lied;

For he, indeed, was purposed to have tried
 To win the fleece neither by war or stealth :
 But by an open hand and heaps of wealth,
 If so it might be, bear it back again,
 Nor with a handful fight a host in vain.

But being now silent, at the last he saw
 A stir among those folk, who 'gan to draw
 Apart to right and left, leaving a man 341
 Alone amidst them, unarmed, with a wan
 And withered face, and black beard mixed with
 grey

That swept his girdle, who these words did say :—

' O seafarers, I give you now to know
 That on this town oft falleth many a foe,
 Therefore not lightly may folk take the land
 With helm on head, and naked steel in hand ;
 Now, since indeed ye folk are but a few, 349
 We fear you not, yet fain would that we knew
 Your names and countries, since within this town
 Of Æa may a good man lay him down
 And fear for nought, at least while I am king,
 Æetes, born to heed full many a thing.'

Now Jason, hearing this desired name
 He thought to hear, grown hungrier yet for
 fame,

With eager heart, and fair face flushed for pride,
 Said : ' King Æetes, if not over wide
 My name is known, that yet may come to be,
 For I am Jason of the Minyæ, 360
 And through great perils have I come from
 Greece.

And now, since this is Æa, and the fleece
 Thou slayedst once a guest to get, hangs up
 Within thine house, take many a golden cup,

356 hungrier yet for] hungrier for

And arms, and dyestuffs, cloth, and spice, and
gold,

Yea, all the goods that lie within our hold ;
Which are not mean, for neither have we come
Leaving all things of price shut up at home,
Nor have we seen the faces of great kings
And left them giftless ; therefore take these
things 370

And be our friend ; or, few folk as we are,
The Gods and we may bring thee bitter care.'

Then spake Æetes . ' Not for any word,
Or for the glitter of thy bloodless sword,
O youngling, will I give the fleece to thee,
Nor yet for gifts,—for what are such to me ?
Behold, if all thy folk joined hand to hand
They should not, striving, be enough to stand
And girdle round my bursting treasure-house ;
Yet, since of this thing thou art amorous,
And I love men, and hold the Gods in fear,
If thou and thine will land, then mayst thou hear
What great things thou must do to win the
fleece ; 383

Then, if thou wilt not dare it, go in peace.
But come now, thou shalt hear it amidst wine
And lovely things, and songs well-nigh divine,
And all the feasts that thou hast shared erewhile
With other kings, to mine shall be but vile.
Lest thou shouldst name me, coming to thy land,
A poor guest-fearing man, of niggard hand.'

So spake he outwardly, but inly thought,
' Within two days this lading shall be brought
To lie amongst my treasures with the best,
While 'neath the earth these robbers lie at rest.'

But Jason said : ' King, if these things be such
As man may do, I shall not fear them much,

And at thy board will I feast merrily 397
 To-night, if on the morrow I must die ;
 And yet, beware of treason, since for nought
 Such lives as ours by none are lightly bought.

‘ Draw on, O heroes, to the shore, if ye
 Are willing still this great king’s house to see.’

Thereat was Argo brought up to the shore,
 And straight all landed from her, less and more,
 And the king spake to Jason homed words,
 And idle were all spears, and sheathed all swords,
 As toward the palace they were gently brought.
 But Jason, smiling outwardly, yet thought
 Within his heart : ‘ All this is fair enow,
 Yet do I think it but an empty show ; 410
 Natheless, until the end comes, will not I,
 Like a bad player, spoil the bravery
 By breaking out before they call my turn,
 And then of me some mastery they may learn.’

Amidst these thoughts, between the fair
 streets led,
 He noted well the size and goodly-head
 Of all the houses, and the folk well clad,
 And armed as though good store of wealth they
 had,
 Peering upon them with a wondering gaze.
 At last a temple, built in ancient days 420
 Ere ÆEa was a town, they came unto ;
 Huge was it, but not fair unto the view
 Of one beholding from without, but round
 The ancient place they saw a spot of ground
 Where laurels grew each side the temple door,
 And two great images set up before
 The brazen doors, whereof the one was She
 Who draws this way and that the fitful sea ;

The other the great God, the Life of man,
 Who makes the brown earth green, the green
 earth wan, 430
 From spring to autumn, through quick follow-
 ing days,
 The lovely archer with his crown of rays.

Now over against this temple, towering high
 Above all houses, rose majestically
 Æetes' marble house ; silent it stood,
 Brushed round by doves, though many a stream
 of blood
 Had trickled o'er its stones since it was built,
 But now, unconscious of all woe and guilt,
 It drank the sunlight that fair afternoon. 439

Then spake Æetes : ' Stranger, thou shalt soon
 Hear all thou wouldst hear in my house of gold ;
 Yet ere thou enterest the door, behold
 That ancient temple of the Far Darter,
 And know that thy desire hangeth there,
 Against the gold wall of the inmost shrine,
 Guarded by seven locks, whose keys are thine
 When thou hast done what else thou hast to do,
 And thou mayst well be bold to come thereto.'

'King,' said the prince, 'fear not, but do thy part,
 Nor look to see me turn back faint of heart,
 Though I may die as my forefathers died,
 Who, living long, their loved souls failed to hide
 From death at last, however wise they were.
 But verily, O King, thy house is fair,
 And here I think to see full many a thing
 Men love ; so, whatso the next day may bring,
 Right merrily shall pass these coming hours
 Amidst fair things and wine-cups crowned with
 flowers.'

‘Enter, O guests,’ the king said, ‘and doubt
 not 459
 Ye shall see things to make the heart grow hot
 With joy and longing.’

As he spoke, within

Blew up the horns, as when a king doth win
 His throne at last, and from behind, the men
 Who hedged the heroes in, shouted as when
 He stands up on his throne, hidden no more.
 Then those within threw open wide the door,
 And straight the king took Jason by the hand,
 And entered, and the Minyæ did stand
 In such a hall as there has never been 469
 Before or afterwards, since Ops was queen.

The pillars, made the mighty roof to hold,
 ‘The one was silver and the next was gold,
 All down the hall; the roof, of some strange wood
 Brought over sea, was dyed as red as blood,
 Set thick with silver flowers, and delight
 Of intertwining figures wrought aright.
 With richest webs the marble walls were hung,
 Picturing sweet stories by the poets sung
 From ancient days, so that no wall seemed there,
 But rather forests black and meadows fair,
 And streets of well-built towns, with tumbling
 seas 481

About their marble wharves and palaces;
 And fearful crags and mountains; and all trod
 By changing feet of giant, nymph, and God,
 Spear-shaking warrior and slim-ankled maid.

The floor, moreover, of the place was laid
 With coloured stones, wrought like a flowery
 mead;

And ready to the hand for every need,

484 By many a changing foot of nymph and God,

Midmost the hall, two fair streams trickled down
O'er wondrous gem-like pebbles, green and
brown, 490
Betwixt smooth banks of marble, and therein
Bright-coloured fish shone through the water
thin.

Now, 'midst these wonders were there tables
spread,
Whither the wondering seafarers were led,
And there with meat and drink full delicate
Were feasted, and strange dainty things they
ate,
Of unused savour, and drank godlike wine ;
While from the golden galleries, divine,
Heart-softening music breathed about the place ;
And 'twixt the pillars, at a gentle pace, 500
Passed lovely damsels, raising voices sweet
And shrill unto the music, while their feet
From thin dusk raiment now and then would
gleam
Upon the polished edges of the stream.

Long sat the Minyæ there, and for their parts
Few words they said, because, indeed, their
 hearts,
O'er-burdened with delight, still dreaded death;
Nor did they think that they might long draw
 breath
In such an earthly Paradise as this, 509
But looked to find sharp ending to their bliss.

Sat waiting, while within the music ceased,
 But from without a strain rose and increased,
 Till shrill and clear it drew anigh the hall,
 But silent at the entry did it fall ; 30
 And through the place there was no other sound
 But falling of light footsteps on the ground,
 For at the door a band of maids was seen,
 Who went up towards the dais, a lovely queen
 Being in their midst, who, coming nigh the place
 Where the king sat, passed at a gentle pace
 Alone before the others to the board,
 And said : ' Æetes, father; and good lord,
 What is it thou wouldst have of me to-night ? '

' O daughter,' said Æetes, ' tell aright 40
 Unto this king's son here, who is my guest,
 What things he must accomplish, ere his quest
 Is finished, who has come this day to seek
 The golden fell brought hither by the Greek,
 The son of Athamas, the unlucky king,
 That he may know at last for what a thing
 He left the meadowy land and peaceful stead.'

Then she to Jason turned her golden head,
 And reaching out her lovely arm, took up
 From off the board a rich fair-jewelled cup,
 And said : ' O prince, these hard things must ye
 do :— 51

First, going to their stall, bring out the two
 Great brazen bulls, the king my father feeds
 On grass of Pontus and strange-nurtured seeds ;
 Nor heed what they may do, but take the plough
 That in their stall stands ever bright enow,
 And on their gleaming necks cast thou the yoke,
 And drive them as thou mayst, with cry and
 stroke,

Through the grey acre of the God of War.

‘ Then, when turned up the long straight fur-
rows are, 60
Take thou the sack that holds the serpents’ teeth
Our fathers slew upon the sunless heath,
There sow those evil seeds, and bide thou there
Till they send forth a strange crop, nothing fair,
Which garner thou, if thou canst ’scape from
death.

‘ But if thereafter still thou drawest breath,
Then shalt thou have the seven keys of the shrine
Wherein the beast’s fair golden locks yet shine;
But yet sing not the song of triumph then,
Or think thyself the luckiest of men; 70
For just within the brazen temple-gates
The guardian of the fleece for ever waits,—
A fork-tongued dragon, charmed for evermore
To writhe and wallow on the precious floor,
Sleepless, upon whose skin no steel will bite.

‘ If then with such an one thou needs must fight,
Or knowest arts to tame him, do thy worst,
Nor, carrying off the prize, shalt thou be curst
By us or any God. But yet, think well
If these three things be not impossible 80
To any man; and make a bloodless end
Of this thy quest, and as my father’s friend
Well gifted, in few days return in peace,
Lacking for nought, forgetful of the fleece.’

Therewith she made an end; but while she
spoke
Came Love unseen, and cast his golden yoke
About them both, and sweeter her voice grew,
And softer ever, as betwixt them flew,
With fluttering wings, the new-born, strong
desire;

And when her eyes met his grey eyes, on fire
With that that burned her, then with sweet new
shame

Her fair face reddened, and there went and came
Delicious tremors through her. But he said :—

'A bitter song thou singest, royal maid,
Unto a sweet tune ; yet doubt not that I
To-morrow this so certain death will try ;
And dying, may perchance not pass unwept,
And with sweet memories may my name be kept,
That men call Jason of the Minyæ.'

Then said she, trembling: 'Take, then, this of
me. 100

And drink in token that thy life is passed,
And that thy reckless hand the die has cast.'

Therewith she reached the cup to him, but he
Stretched out his hand, and took it joyfully,
As with the cup he touched her dainty hand,
Nor was she loth awhile with him to stand,
Forgetting all else in that homied pain.

At last she turned, and with head raised again
He drank, and swore for nought to leave that
quest

Till he had reached the worst end or the best ;
And down the hall the clustering Minyæ III
Shouted for joy his godlike face to see.

But she, departing, made no further sign
Of her desires, but, while with song and wine
They feasted till the fevered night was late,
Within her bower she sat, made blind by fate.

But, when all hushed and still the palace grew,
She put her gold robes off, and on her drew
A dusky gown, and with a wallet small

116 bower she sat] chamber sat

And cutting wood-knife girt herself withal,
 And from her dainty chamber softly passed
 Through stairs and corridors, until at last
 She came down to a gilded watergate,
 Which with a golden key she opened straight,
 And swiftly stept into a little boat,
 And, pushing off from shore, began to float
 Adown the stream, and with her tender hands
 And half-bared arms, the wonder of all lands,
 Rowed strongly through the starlit gusty night
 As though she knew the watery way aright.

So, from the city being gone apace, 131
 Turning the boat's head, did she near a space
 Where, by the water's edge, a thick yew wood
 Made a black blot on the dim gleaming flood :
 But when she reached it, dropping either oar
 Upon the grassy bank, she leapt ashore
 And to a yew-bough made the boat's head fast.
 Then here and there quick glances did she cast
 And listened, lest some wanderer should be nigh.
 Then by the river's side she tremblingly 140
 Undid the bands that bound her yellow hair
 And let it float about her, and made bare
 Her shoulder and right arm, and, kneeling down,
 Drew off her shoes, and girded up her gown,
 And in the river washed her silver feet
 And trembling hands, and then turned round to
 meet

The yew-wood's darkness, gross and palpable,
 As though she made for some place known full well.

Beneath her feet the way was rough enow,
 And often would she meet some trunk or bough,
 And draw back shrinking, then press on again
 With eager steps, not heeding fear or pain ;

At last an open space she came unto, 153
 Where the faint glimmering starlight, shining
 through,
 Showed in the midst a circle of smooth grass,
 Through which, from dark to dark, a stream
 did pass,
 And all around was darkness like a wall.

So, kneeling there, she let the wallet fall,
 And from it drew a bundle of strange wood
 Wound all about with strings as red as blood ;
 Then breaking these, into a little pyre 161
 The twigs she built, and swiftly kindling fire,
 Set it alight, and with her head bent low
 Sat patiently, and watched the red flames grow
 Till it burned bright and lit the dreary place ;
 Then, leaving it, she went a little space
 Into the shadow of the circling trees
 With wood-knife drawn, and whiles upon her
 knees
 She dropt, and sweeping the sharp knife around,
 Took up some scarce-seen thing from off the
 ground 170

And thrust it in her bosom, and at last
 Into the darkness of the trees she passed.

Meanwhile, the new fire burned with clear red
 flame,
 Not wasting aught ; but when again she came
 Into its light, within her caught-up gown
 Much herbs she had, and on her head a crown
 Of dank night-flowering grasses, known to few.
 But, casting down the mystic herbs, she drew
 From out her wallet a bowl polished bright,
 Brazen, and wrought with figures black and
 white, 180

173 the new fire] the fire

Which from the stream she filled with water thin,
 And, kneeling by the fire, cast therein
 Shreddings of many herbs, and setting it
 Amidst the flames, she watched them curl and flit
 About the edges of the blackening brass.
 But when strange fumes began therefrom to pass,
 And clouds of thick white smoke about her flew,
 And colourless and sullen the fire grew,
 Unto her fragrant breast her hand she set,
 And drew therefrom a bag of silken fret, 190
 And into her right palm she gently shook
 Three grains of something small that had the
 look
 Of millet seeds, then laid the bag once more
 On that sweet hidden place it kissed before,
 And, lifting up her right hand, murmured
 low :—

‘ O Three-formed, Venerable, dost thou know
 That I have left to-night my golden bed
 On the sharp pavement of thy wood to shed
 Blood from my naked feet, and from mine eyes
 Intolerable tears ; to pour forth sighs 200
 In the thick darkness, as with footsteps weak
 And trembling knees I prowl about to seek
 That which I need forsooth, but fear to find ?
 What wouldest thou, my Lady ? art thou blind,
 Or sleepest thou, or dost thou, dread one, see
 About me somewhat that misliketh thee ?
 What crown but thine is on mine unbound hair
 What jewel on my arms, or have I care
 Against the flinty windings of thy wood
 To guard my feet ? or have I thought it good
 To come before thee with unwashed hands ?

‘ And this my raiment : Goddess, from three
lands 212
The fleeces it was woven with were brought
Where deeds of thine in ancient days were
wrought,

Delos, and Argos, and the Carian mead ;
Nor was it made, O Goddess, with small heed ;
By unshod maidens was the yarn well spun,
And at the moonrise the close web begun,
And finished at the dawning of the light.

‘ Nought hides me from the unseen eyes of night
But this alone, what dost thou then to me,
That at my need my flame sinks wretchedly,
And all is vain I do ? Ah, is it so 223

That to some other helper I must go
Better at need ; wilt thou then take my part
Once more, and pity my divided heart ?
For never was I vowed to thee alone,
Nor didst thou bid me take the tight-drawn zone,
And follow through the twilight of the trees
The glancing limbs of trim-shod huntresses.
Therefore, look down upon me, and see now
These grains of what thou knowest, I will throw
Upon the flame, and then, if at my need 233
Thou still wilt help me, help ; but if indeed
I am forsaken of thee utterly,
The naked knees of Venus will I try ;
And I may hap ere long to please her well
And one more story they may have to tell
Who in the flowery isle her praises sing.’

So speaking, on the dulled fire did she fling
The unknown grains ; but when the Three-
formed heard 241

240 the dulled fire] the fire

From out her trembling lips that impious word,
She granted all her asking, though she knew
What evil road Medea hurried to
She fain had barred against her on that night.
So, now again the fire flamed up bright,
The smoke grew thin, and in the brazen bowl,
Boiling, the mingled herbs did twine and roll,
And with new light Medea's wearied eyes 249
Gleamed in the fire'shine o'er those mysteries ;
And, taking a green twig from off the ground,
Therewith she stirred the mess, that cast around
A shower of hissing sparks and vapour white,
Sharp to the taste, and 'wildering to the sight ;
Which when she saw, the vessel off she drew,
As though the ending of her toil she knew,
And cooling for awhile she let it stand,
But at the last therein she laid her hand,
And when she drew it out she thrust the same
Amidst the fire, but neither coal or flame 260
The tender rosy flesh could harm a whit,
Nor was there mark or blemish left on it.

Then did she pour whatso the bowl did hold
 Into a fair gemmed phial wrought of gold
 She drew out from the wallet, and straightway
 Stopping the mouth, in its own place did lay
 The well-wrought phial, girding to her side
 The wallet that the precious thing did hide ;
 Then all the remnants of the herbs she cast
 On to the fire, and straight therefrom there
 passed 270
 A high white flame, and when that sunk, outright
 The fire died into the voiceless night.

But toward the river did she turn again,
Not heeding the rough ways or any pain,

But running swiftly came unto her boat,
 And in the mid-stream soon was she afloat,
 Drawn onward toward the town by flood of tide.

Nor heeded she that by the river side
 Still lay her golden shoes, a goodly prize
 To some rough fisher in whose sleepy eyes 280
 They first should shine, the while he drew his net
 Against the yew wood of the Goddess set.

But she, swept onward by the hurrying stream,
 Down in the east beheld a doubtful gleam
 That told of dawn ; so bent unto the oar
 In terror lest her folk should wake before
 Her will was wrought ; nor failed she now to hear
 From neighbouring homesteads shrilly notes and
 clear

Of waking cocks, and twittering from the sedge
 Of restless birds about the river's edge ; 290
 And when she drew between the city walls,
 She heard the hollow sound of rare footfalls
 From men who needs must wake for that or this
 While upon sleepers gathered dreams of bliss,
 Or great distress at ending of the night,
 And greythings coloured with the gathering light.

At last she reached the gilded water-gate,
 And though nigh breathless, scarce she dared to
 wait

To fasten up her shallop to the stone,
 Which yet she dared not leave ; so this being done,
 Swiftly by passages and stairs she ran, 301
 Trembling and pale, though not yet seen by man,
 Until to Jason's chamber door she came.

And there awhile indeed she stayed, for shame
 Rose up against her fear ; but mighty love

And the sea-haunting rose-crowned seed of Jove
 O'ermastered both ; so trembling, on the pin
 She laid her hand, but ere she entered in
 She covered up again her shoulder sweet,
 And dropped her dusky raiment o'er her feet ;
 Then entering the dimly-lighted room, 311
 Where with the lamp dawn struggled, through the
 gloom,

Seeking the prince she peered, who sleeping lay
 Upon his gold bed, and abode the day
 Smiling, still clad in arms, and round his sword
 His fingers met ; then she, with a soft word,
 Came nigh him, and from out his slackened hand
 With slender rosy fingers drew the brand, 318
 Then kneeling, laid her hand upon his breast,
 And said : ' O Jason, wake up from thy rest,
 Perchance from thy last rest, and speak to me.'

Then fell his light sleep from him suddenly,
 And on one arm he rose, and clenched his hand,
 Raising it up, as though it held the brand,
 And on this side and that began to stare.

But bringing close to him her visage fair,
 She whispered : ' Smite not, for thou hast no
 sword,

Speak not above thy breath, for one loud word
 May slay both thee and me. Day grows apace ;
 What day thou knowest ! Canst thou see my
 face ? 330

Last night thou didst behold it with such eyes,
 That I, Medea, wise among the wise,
 The safeguard of my father and his land,
 Who have been used with steady eyes to stand
 In awful groves alone with Hecate,
 Henceforth must call myself the bond of thee,

The fool of love ; speak not, but kiss me, then,
 Yea, kiss my lips, that not the best of men
 Has touched ere thou. Alas, quick comes the
 day ! 339

Draw back, but hearken what I have to say,
 For every moment do I dread to hear
 Thy wakened folk, or our folk drawing near ;
 Therefore I speak as if with my last breath,
 Shameless, beneath the shadowing wings of
 death,

That still may let us twain again to meet,
 And snatch from bitter love the bitter sweet
 That some folk gather while they wait to die.

‘ Alas, I loiter, and the day is nigh !
 Soothly I came to bring thee more than this,
 The memory of an unasked fruitless kiss 350
 Upon thy death-day, which this day would be
 If there were not some little help in me.’

Therewith from out her wallet did she draw
 The phial, and a crystal without flaw
 Shaped like an apple, scored with words about,
 Then said : ‘ But now I bid thee have no doubt.
 With this oil hidden by these gems and gold
 Anoint thine arms and body, and be bold,
 Nor fear the fire-breathing bulls one whit,
 Such mighty virtue have I drawn to it, 360
 Whereof I give thee proof.’ Therewith her hand
 She thrust into the lamp-flame that did stand
 Anigh the bed, and showed it him again
 Unscarred by any wound or drawn with pain,
 Then said : ‘ Now, when Mars’ plain is ploughed
 at last

And in the furrows those ill seeds are cast,
 Take thou this ball in hand and watch the thing ;
 Then shalt thou see a horrid crop upspring

Of all-armed men therefrom to be thy bane,
 Were I not here to make their fury vain. 370
 Draw not thy sword against them as they rise,
 But cast this ball amid them, and their eyes
 Shall serve them then but little to see thee,
 And each of others' weapons slain shall be.

' Now will my father hide his rage at heart,
 And praise thee much that thou hast played
 thy part,

And bid thee to a banquet on this night,
 And pray thee wait until to-morrow's light
 Before thou triest the Temple of the Fleece.
 Trust not to him, but see that unto Greece
 The ship's prow turns, and all is ready there.
 And at the banquet let thy men forbear 382
 The maddening wine, and bid them arm them all
 For what upon this night may chance to fall.

' But I will get by stealth the keys that hold
 The seven locks which guard the Fleece of Gold ;
 And while we try the fleece, let thy men steal,
 How so they may, unto thy ready keel,
 Thus art thou saved alive with thy desire.

' But what thing will be left to me but fire ?
 The fire of fierce despair within my heart, 391
 The while I reap my guerdon for my part,
 Curses and torments, and in no long space
 Real fire of pine-wood in some rocky place,
 Wreathing around my body greedily,
 A dreadful beacon o'er the leaden sea.'

But Jason drew her to him, and he said :—
 ' Nay, by these tender hands and golden head,
 That saving things for me have wrought to-
 night,

385 But I will] Now will I

I know not what ; by this unseen delight 400
 Of thy fair body, may I rather burn,
 Nor may the flame die ever if I turn
 Back to my hollow ship, and leave thee here,
 Who in one minute art become so dear,
 Thy limbs so longed for, that at last I know
 Why men have been content to suffer woe
 Past telling, if the Gods but granted this,
 A little while such lips as thine to kiss,
 A little while to drink such deep delight.

‘ What wouldst thou ? Wilt thou go from me ?

The light 410

Is grey and tender yet, and in your land
 Surely the twilight, lingering long, doth stand
 ‘Twixt dawn and day.’

‘ O Prince,’ she said, ‘ I came
 To save your life. I cast off fear and shame
 A little while, but fear and shame are here.
 The hand thou holdest trembles with my fear,
 With shame my cheeks are burning, and the
 sound

Of mine own voice : but ere this hour comes
 round, 418

We twain will be betwixt the dashing oars,
 The ship still making for the Grecian shores.
 Farewell, till then, though in the lists to-day
 Thyself shalt see me, watching out the play.’

Therewith she drew off from him, and was gone,
 And in the chamber Jason left alone,
 Praising the heavenly one, the Queen of Jove,
 Pondered upon this unasked gift of love,
 And all the changing wonder of his life.

But soon he rose to fit him for the strife,

404 minute] hour

And ere the sun his orb began to lift
 O'er the dark hills, with fair Medea's gift 430
 His arms and body he anointed well,
 And round about his neck he hung the spell
 Against the earth-born, the fair crystal ball
 Laid in a purse, and then from wall to wall,
 Athwart the chamber paced full eagerly,
 Expecting when the fateful time should be.

Meanwhile, Medea coming to her room
 Unseen, lit up the slowly parting gloom
 With scented torches · then bound up her hair,
 And stripped the dark gown from her body
 fair, 440

And laid it with the brass bowl in a chest,
 Where many a day it had been wont to rest,
 Brazen and bound with iron, and whose key
 No eye but hers had ever happed to see.

Then wearied, on her bed she cast her down,
 And strove to think; but soon the uneasy frown
 Faded from off her brow, her lips closed tight
 But now, just parted, and her fingers white 449
 Slackened their hold upon the coverlet,
 And o'er her face faint smiles began to flit,
 As o'er the summer pool the faint soft air :
 So instant and so kind the God was there.

BOOK VIII

The taming of the brazen bulls—The destruction of the
 Earth-born.

Now when she woke again the bright sun glared
 In at the window, and the trumpets blared,
 Shattering the sluggish air of that hot day,
 For fain the king would be upon his way.

Then straight she called her maidens, who forth-
right

Did due observance to her body white,
And clad her in the raiment of a queen,
And round her crown they set a wreath of green.

But she descending, came into the hall,
And found her father clad in royal pall, 10
Holding the ivory rod of sovereignty,
And Jason and his folk were standing by.

Now was Æetes saying : ' Minyæ,
And you, my people, who are here by me,
Take heed, that by his wilful act to-day
This man will perish, neither will I slay
One man among you. Nay, Prince, if you will,
A safe return I give unto you still.'

But Jason answered, smiling in his joy :—
' Once more, Æetes, nay. Against this toy
My life is pledged, let all go to the end.' 21
Then, lifting up his eyes, he saw his friend,
Made fresh, and lovelier by her quiet rest,
And set his hand upon his mailed breast,
Where in its covering lay the crystal ball.

But the king said : ' Then let what will fall,
fall !

Since time it is that we were on the way ;
And thou, O daughter, shalt be there to-day,
And see thy father's glory once more shown 29
Before our folk and those the wind has blown
From many lands to see this play played out.'

Then raised the Colchians a mighty shout,
And doubtful grew the Minyæ of the end,
Unwitting who on that day was their friend.
But down the hall the king passed, who did hold
Medea's hand, and on a car of gold
They mounted, drawn anigh the carven door,

And spearmen of the Colchians went before
 And followed after, and the Minyæ
 Set close together followed solemnly, 40
 Headed by Jason, at the heels of these.

So passed they through the streets and palaces
 Thronged with much folk, and o'er the bridges
 passed,

And to the open country came at last,
 Nor there went far, but turning to the right,
 Into a close they came, where there were dight
 Long galleries about the fateful stead,
 Built all of marble fair and roofed with lead,
 And carved about with stories of old time,
 Framed all about with golden lines of rhyme.
 Moreover, midmost was an image made 51
 Of mighty Mars who maketh kings afraid,
 That looked down on an altar builded fair,
 Wherefrom already did a bright fire glare
 And made the hot air glassy with its heat.

So in the gallery did the king take seat
 With fair Medea, and the Colchians stood
 Hedging the twain in with a mighty wood
 Of spears and axes, while the Minyæ
 Stood off a space the fated things to see. 60

Ugly and rugged was that spot of ground,
 And with an iron wall was closed around,
 And at the further end a monstrous cage
 Of iron bars, shut in the stupid rage
 Of those two beasts, and therefrom ever came
 The flashing and the scent of sulphurous flame,
 As with their brazen, clangorous bellowing
 They hailed the coming of the Colchian king;
 Nor was there one of the seafaring men

50 Framed all about with] And all around them

54 a bright fire] a fire

But trembled, gazing on the deadly pen, 70
 But Jason only, who before the rest
 Shone like a star, having upon his breast
 A golden corslet from the treasury
 Of wise King Phineus by the doubtful sea,
 By an Egyptian wrought who would not stay
 At Salmydessa more than for a day,
 But on that day the wondrous breast-plate
 wrought,
 Which, with good will and strong help, Jason
 bought ;
 And from that treasury his golden shoe
 Came, and his thighs the king's gift covered too ;
 But on his head his father's helm was set 81
 Wreathed round with bay leaves, and his sword
 lay yet

Within the scabbard, while his ungloved hand
 Bore nought within it but an olive wand.

Now King Æetes well beholding him,
 Fearless of mien and so unmatched of limb,
 Trembled a little in his heart as now
 He bade the horn-blowers the challenge blow,
 But thought, ' what strength can help him, or
 what art,
 Or which of all the Gods be on his part ? ' 90
 Impious, who knew not through what doubtful
 days,

E'en from his birth, and perilous rough ways
 Juno had brought him safely, nor indeed
 Of his own daughter's quivering lips took heed,
 And restless hands wherein the God so wrought,
 The wise man seeing her had known her thought.

Now Jason, when he heard the challenge blow,
 Across the evil fallow 'gan to go

With face beyond its wont in nowise pale,
 Nor footstep faltering, if that might avail 100
 The doomed man aught : so to the cage he came,
 Whose bars now glowed red-hot with spouted
 flame,

In many a place ; nor doubted any one
 Who there beheld him that his days were done,
 Except his love alone, and even she,
 Sickening with doubt and terror, scarce could see
 The hero draw the brazen bolt aside
 And throw the glowing wicket open wide.

But he alone, apart from his desire,
 Stood unarmed, facing those two founts of fire,
 Yet feared not aught, for hope and fear were
 dead 111

Within his heart, and utter hardihead
 Had Juno set there ; but the awful beasts
 Beholding now the best of all their feasts,
 Roared in their joy and fury, till from sight
 They and the prince were hidden by the white
 Thick rolling clouds of sulphurous pungent
 smoke,
 Through which upon the blinded man they
 broke.

But when within a yard of him they came,
 Baffled they stopped, still bellowing, and the
 flame 120
 Still spouting out from nostril and from mouth,
 As from some island mountain in the south
 The trembling mariners behold it cast ;
 But still to right and left of him it passed,
 Breaking upon him as cool water might,
 Nor harming more, except that from his sight
 All corners of the cage were hidden now,

Nor knew he where to seek the brazen plough ;
 As to and fro about the quivering cage
 The monsters rushed in blind and helpless rage.

But as he doubted, to his eyes alone 131
 Within the place a golden light outshone,
 Scattering the clouds of smoke, and he beheld
 Once more the Goddess who his head upheld
 In rough Anaurus on that other tide ;
 She, smiling on him, beckoned, and 'gan glide
 With rosy feet across the fearful floor,
 Breathing cool odours round her, till a door
 She opened to him in the iron wall,
 Through which he passed, and found a grisly
 stall 140

Of iron still, and at one end of it,
 By glimmering lamps with greenish flame half
 lit,
 Beheld the yoke and shining plough he sought ;
 Which, seizing straight, by mighty strength he
 brought

Unto the door, nor found the Goddess there,
 Who in the likeness of a damsel fair,
 Colchian Metharma, through the spearmen
 passed,

Bearing them wine, and causeless terror cast
 Into their foolish hearts, nor spared to go
 And 'mid the close seafaring ranks to sow 150
 Good hope of joyful ending, and then stood
 Behind the maid unseen, and brought the blood
 Back to her cheeks and trembling lips and wan,
 With thoughts of things unknown to maid or
 man.

Meanwhile upon the foreheads of the twain
 Had Jason cast the yoke with little pain,

130 blind and helpless] helpless and blind

And drove them now with shouts out through
the door

Which in such guise ne'er had they passed before,
For never were they made the earth to till,
But rather, feeding fat, to work the will 160
Of some all-knowing man; but now they went
Like any peasant's beasts, tamed by the scent
Of those new herbs Medea's hand had plucked,
Whose roots from evil earth strange power had
sucked.

Now in the open field did Jason stand
And to the plough-stilts set his unused hand,
And down betwixt them lustily he bent;
Then the bulls drew, and the bright ploughshare
sent

The loathly fallow up on the right side, 169
Whilst o'er their bellowing shrilly Jason cried:—
'Draw nigh, O King, and thy new ploughman see,
Then mayst thou make me shepherd, too, to thee;
Nor doubt thou, doing so, from out thy flock
To lose but one, who ne'er shall bring thee stock,
Or ram or ewe, nor doubt the grey wolf, King,
Wood-haunting bear, dragon, or such like thing.
Ah the straight furrow! how it mindeth me
Of the smooth parting of the land-locked sea
Over against Eubœa, and this fire
Of the fair altar where my joyful sire 180
Will pour out wine to Neptune when I come
Not empty-handed back unto my home.'

Such mocks he said; but when the sunlight
broke

Upon his armour through the sulphurous smoke,
And showed the lengthening furrow cutting
through

The ugly farrow as anigh they drew,
 The joyful Minyæ gave a mighty shout ;
 But pale the king sat with brows knit for doubt,
 Muttering : ' Whose counsel hast thou taken,
 then, 189

To do this thing, which not the best of men
 Could do unholpen of some sorcery ?
 Whoso it is, wise were he now to die
 Ere yet I know him, since for many a day
 Vainly for death I hope to hear him pray.'

Meanwhile, askance Medea eyed the king,
 Thinking nought safe until that everything
 Was finished in the Colchian land, and she
 No more beheld its shores across the sea ;
 But he, beholding her pale visage, thought
 Grief like to his such paleness on her brought,
 And turning to her, said : ' How pale thou art !
 Let not this first foil go unto thine heart 202
 Too deeply, since thou knowest certainly,
 One way or other this vain fool must die.'
 ' Father,' she said, ' a doubt is on me still,
 Some God this is come here our wealth to spill ;
 Nor is this first thing easier than the rest.'
 Then stammering, she said : ' Were it not best
 To give him that which he must have at last,
 Before he slays us.' But Æetes cast 210
 A sharp glance at her, and a pang shot through
 His weary heart as half the truth he knew.
 But for one moment, and he made reply
 In passionate words : ' Then, daughter, let me die!
 And, ere I die, behold thee led along
 A wretched slave to suffer grief and wrong

186 farrow, a misprint; read fallow as in first edition.

202 Yet let not this first foil go to thine heart

213 and] as

In far-off lands, and Æta at thy back
 Nought but a huge flame hiding woe and wrack,
 Before from out my willing open hand 219
 This wonder, and the safeguard of my land
 A God shall take; and such this man is not.
 What! dost thou think because his eyes are hot
 On tender maidens he must be a God?
 Or that because firmly this field he trod
 Well-fenced with magic? Were he like to me,
 Grey-haired and lean, what Godhead wouldst
 thou see

In such an one? Hold, then, thy peace of this,
 And thou shalt see thy God full widely miss
 The mark he aims at, when from out the earth
 Spring up those brothers of an evil birth.' 230

And therewithal he gazed at her, and thought
 To see the rosy flush by such words brought
 Across her face; as in the autumn eve,
 Just as the sun's last half begins to leave
 The shivering world, both east and west are red.—
 But calm and pale she turned about her head,
 And said: 'My father, neither were these words
 My words, nor would I struggle with my lords;
 Thou art full wise; whatso thine heart would have
 That do, and heed me not, who fain would save
 This glory of thy kingdom and of thee. 241
 But now look up, and soothly thou shalt see
 Mars' acre tilled: the field is ready then,
 Bid them bring forth the seed that beareth men.'

Again with her last words the shouts out-broke
 From the seafearers, for, beside the yoke,
 Before Mars' altar did Prince Jason stand,
 Holding the wand of olive in his hand,

245 out-broke] broke out

246 seafearers, a misprint; read seafarers as in first edition.

And on the new-turned furrow shone the sun
Behind him, and his half-day's work was done.

And now another marvel : for, behold, 251
As at the furrow's end he slacked his hold
Upon the plough-stilts, all the bellowing
Wherewith the beasts had made the grim close
ring,

Fell suddenly, and all the fire died
That they were wont erewhile to scatter wide
From mouth and nostril, and their loins and knees
Stiffened, and they grew nought but images
Lifelike but lifeless, wonderful but dead,
Such as he makes, who many a day hath fed
His furnace with the beechwood, when the clay
Has grown beneath his deft hands day by day
And all is ready for the casting, then 263
Such things as these he makes for royal men.

But 'mid the shouts turned Jason to the king,
And said : ' Fair sir, behold a wondrous thing,
And since these beasts have been content to stay
Before Mars' altar, from this very day
His should they be if they were mine to give.'

' O Jason,' said the king, ' well mayst thou live
For many a day, since thou this deed hast done,
But for the Gods, not unto any one 272
Will I give gifts ; but let them take from me
What once they gave, if so the thing must be.
But do thou take this sack from out my hand
And cast its seed about the new-tilled land,
And watch the issue ; and keep words till then,
I counsel thee, O luckiest of men.'

Then Jason took the sack, and with it went
About that field new turned, and broadcast sent

The white teeth scattering, but or ere he came
 Back to the altar, and the flickering flame,
 He heard from 'neath the earth a muttered
 sound 283

That grew and grew, till all that piece of ground
 Swelled into little hillocks, like as where
 A stricken field was foughten, but that there
 Quiet the heroes' bones lie underneath
 The quivering grasses and the dusky heath ;
 But now these heaps the labouring earth up-
 threw

About Mars' acre, ever greater grew, 290
 And still increased the noise, till none could
 hear

His fellow speak, and paleness and great fear
 Fell upon all ; and Jason only stood
 As stands the stout oak in the poplar wood
 When winds are blowing.

Then he saw the mounds
 Bursten asunder, and the muttered sounds
 Changed into loud strange shouts and warlike
 clang,

As with freed feet at last the earth-born sprang
 On to the tumbling earth, and the sunlight
 Shone on bright arms clean ready for the fight.

But terribly they showed, for through the
 place 301

Not one there was but had his staring face,
 With great wide eyes, and lips in a set smile,
 Turned full on Jason, who, for a short while,
 Forgot indeed Medea's warning word,
 And from its golden sheath half drew his sword,
 But then, remembering all, cried valiantly :
 ' New born ye are—new slain too shall ye be,
 Take this, and round about it read your doom,

And bid them make new dwellings in the tomb,
Wherefrom ye came, nor ever should have
passed.' 311

Therewith the ball among the host he cast,
Standing to watch what next that folk would do.
But he the ball had smitten turned unto
The one who stood by him and like a cup
Shattered his head ; then the next lifted up
His axe and slew the slayer, and straightway
Among the rest began a deadly fray.

No man gave back a foot, no breathing space
One took or gave within that dreadful place,
But where the vanquished stood there was he
slain, 321

And straight the conquering arm was raised
again

To meet its match and in its turn to fall,
No tide was there of fainting and recall,
No quivering pennon o'er their heads to flit,
Nor name or eager shout called over it,
No groan of pain, and no despairing cry
From him who knows his time has come to die,
But passionless each bore him in that fight,
Scarce otherwise than as a smith might smite
On sounding iron or bright glittering brass.

So, little by little, did the clamour pass
As one by one each fell down in his place,
Until at last, midmost the bloody space, 334
One man was left, alive but wounded sore,
Who, staring round about and seeing no more
His brothers' spears against him, fixed his eyes
Upon the queller of those mysteries.
Then dreadfully they gleamed, and with no word,
He tottered towards him with uplifted sword.
But scarce he made three paces down the field,

Ere chill death reached his heart, and on his
shield 342

Clattering he fell. So satiate of fight
Quickly the earth-born were, and their delight
With what it fed on perished, and one hour
Ripened the deadly fruit of that fell flower.

Then, Jason, mocking, cried unto the king :—
' O wonderful, indeed, must be the thing
Thou guardest with such wondrous guards as
these ;

Make no delay, therefore, but bring the keys
That I may see this dear delight of all.' 351

But on Æetes' face a change did fall,
As though a mask had been set over it,
And smiles of little meaning 'gan to flit
O'er his thin lips, as he spake out at last :—
' No haste, dear guest, for surely now is passed
All enmity from 'twixt us, since I know
How like a God thou art ; and thou shalt go
To-morrow to thy ship, to make for Greece ;
And with no trial more, bear back the fleece
Along our streets, and like no conquered thing,
But with much scattered flowers and tabouring,
Bearing with it great gifts and all my love ;
And in return, I pray thee, pray to Jove, 364
That I may have a few more years of life,
And end at last in honour, free from strife.
And now to-night be merry, and let time
Be clean forgotten, and bring Saturn's clime
And golden days upon our flower-crowned brows,
For of the unseen future what man knows ?'

' O King,' said Jason, ' for these words I praise
Thy wisdom much, and wish thee happy days.
And I will give thee honour as I can, 373
Naming thee ever as a noble man

Through all the lands I come to : and will take
 Thy gifts, indeed, and thou, for Jason's sake,
 Shalt have gifts too, whatso thy soul may wish,
 From out our keel that has escaped the fish.'

So spake those wary foes, fair friends in look,
 And so in words great gifts they gave and took,
 And had small profit, and small loss thereby.
 Nor less Medea feigned, but angrily 382
 Regarded Jason, and across her brow
 Drew close her veil, nor doubted the king now
 Her faith and loyalty.

So from the place

Back toward the town they turned at a soft
 pace,
 In guise of folk that hold high festival,
 Since straightly had Æetes bid that all
 Should do the strangers pleasure on that day.
 But warily went Jason on the way, 390
 And through his folk spread words, to take good
 heed

Of what might come, and ready be at need,
 Nor yet to take Æetes for their friend,
 Since even then he plotted how to end
 Their quest and lives : therefore he bade them
 spare

The wine that night, nor look on damsels fair ;
 But that, the feast done, all should stealthily
 Get to the quay, and round about to sea
 Turn Argo's head, and wait like hounds in slip,
 Holding the oars, within the hollow ship. 400

'Nor doubt,' said he, 'that good and glorious
 The end shall be, since all the Gods for us
 Are fighting certainly : but should death come
 Upon me in this land, then turn back home,
 Nor wait till they shall lay your bones with mine,

Since now I think to go unto the shrine,
 The while ye wait, and take therefrom the fleece,
 Not all unholpen, and depart in peace,
 While yet the barbarous king beholds us dead
 In dreams alone, or through his waking head
 The vile plots chase each other for our death.'

These things he said, but scarce above his
 breath, 412
 Unto wise Nestor, who beside him went,
 Who unto Butes straight the message sent,
 And he to Phlias, so the words at last
 Throughout the wondering seafarers had passed,
 And so were all made ready for the night.

But on that eve, with manifold delight,
 Æetes feasted them in his fair hall ;
 But they, well knowing what might chance to fall,
 Sat saying little, nor drank deep of wine ;
 Until at last the old king gave the sign 422
 To break the feast up, and within a while
 All seemed asleep throughout the mighty pile.

All seemed asleep, but now Medea went
 With beating heart to work out her intent,
 Scarce doubtful of the end, since only two
 In all the world, she and Æetes, knew
 Where the keys were, far from the light of day,
 Beneath the palace. So, in garments grey,
 Like the soft creeping twilight did she go,
 Until she reached a passage far below 432
 The river, past whose oozing walls of stone
 She and the king alone had ever gone.

Now she, who thus far had come through the
 dark,
 Stopped, and in haste striking a little spark
 From something in her hand, lit up a lamp,

Whose light fell on an iron door, with damp
 All rusted red, which with a key of brass
 She opened, and therethrough made haste to pass,
 Shuddering a little, as her feet 'gan tread 441
 Upon a dank cold floor, though overhead
 High-arched the place was, fairly built enow.

But she across the slippery floor did go
 Unto the other wall, wherein was built
 A little aumbrye, with a door o'er-gilt,
 That with the story of King Athamas
 And Phryxus and the ram all carven was.
 There did she draw forth from her balmy breast
 A yellow flowering herb, that straight she pressed
 Upon the lock, low muttering the while ; 451
 But soon across her face there passed a smile,
 As backward in the lock the bolts did turn,
 And the door opened ; then a golden urn
 She saw within the aumbrye, whereon she
 Drew out the thing she sought for eagerly,
 The seven keys with sere-cloth done about.
 Then through the dreary door did she pass out,
 And made it fast, and went her way once more
 Through the black darkness on from floor to
 floor. 460

And so, being come to Jason, him she found
 All armed, and ready ; therefore, with no sound,
 She beckoned him to follow, and the twain
 Passed through the brazen doors, locked all in
 vain,

Such virtue had the herb Medea bore,
 And passing, did they leave ajar each door,
 To give more ease unto the Minyæ.

So out into the fresh night silently
 The lovers passed, the loveliest of the land ;
 But as they went, neither did hand touch hand,

Or face seek face ; for, gladsome as they were,
 Trembling with joy to be at last so near 472
 The wished-for day, some God yet seemed to be
 'Twixt the hard past and their felicity.

BOOK IX

The Fleece taken from the temple—The departure of
 Argo—The death of Absyrtus

BUT when they reached the precinct of the God,
 And on the hallowed turf their feet now trod,
 Medea turned to Jason, and she said .—

‘ O love, turn round, and note the goodlihead
 My father’s palace shows beneath the stars.
 Bethink thee of the men grown old in wars,
 Who do my bidding ; what delights I have,
 How many ladies lie in wait to save
 My life from toil and carefulness, and think
 How sweet a cup I have been used to drink, 10
 And how I cast it to the ground for thee.

Upon the day thou weariest of me,
 I wish that thou mayst somewhat think of this,
 And ’twixt thy new-found kisses, and the bliss
 Of something sweeter than thine old delight,
 Remember thee a little of this night
 Of marvels, and this starlit, silent place,
 And these two lovers standing face to face.’

‘ O love,’ he said, ‘ by what thing shall I swear,
 That while I live thou shalt not be less dear 20
 Than thou art now ? ’

‘ Nay, sweet,’ she said, ‘ let be ;
 Wert thou more fickle than the restless sea,
 Still should I love thee, knowing thee for such ;
 Whom I know not, indeed, but fear the touch

Of Fortune's hand when she beholds our bliss,
And knows that nought is good to me but this.

' But now be ready, for I long full sore
To hear the merry dashing of the oar,
And feel the freshness of the following breeze
That sets me free, and sniff the rough salt seas.
Look! yonder thou mayst see armed shadows steal
Down to the quays, the guiders of thy keel; 32
Now follow me, though little shalt thou do
To gain this thing, if Hecate be true
Unto her servant. Nay, draw not thy sword,
And, for thy life, speak not a single word
Until I bid thee, else may all be lost,
And of this game our lives yet pay the cost.'

Then toward the brazen temple-door she went,
Wherefrom, half-open, a faint gleam was sent ;
For little need of lock it had forsooth, 41
Because its sleepless guardian knew no ruth,
And had no lust for precious things or gold,
Whom, drawing near, Jason could now behold,
As back Medea thrust the heavy door,
For prone he lay upon the gleaming floor,
Not moving, though his restless, glittering eyes
Left them no hope of wile or of surprise.
Hideous he was, where all things else were fair ;
Dull-skinned, foul-spotted, with lank rusty hair
About his neck ; and hooked yellow claws 51
Just showed from 'neath his belly and huge jaws,
Closed in the hideous semblance of a smile.
Then Jason shuddered, wondering with what guile
That fair king's daughter such a beast could tame,
And of his sheathed sword had but little shame.

48 Gave unto them no least hope of surprise.

54 guile] wile

But being within the doors, both mantle grey
 And heavy gown Medea cast away, 58
 And in thin clinging silk alone was clad,
 And round her neck a golden chain she had,
 Whereto was hung a harp of silver white.
 Then the great dragon, at that glittering sight,
 Raised himself up upon his loathly feet,
 As if to meet her, while her fingers sweet
 Already moved amongst the golden strings,
 Preluding nameless and delicious things ;
 But now she beckoned Jason to her side,
 For slowly towards them 'gan the beast to glide,
 And when close to his love the hero came,
 She whispered breathlessly : ' On me the blame
 If here we perish ; if I give the word, 71
 Then know that all is lost, and draw thy sword,
 And manlike die in battle with the beast ;
 So dying shalt thou fail to see at least
 This body thou desiredst so to see,
 In thy despite here mangled wretchedly.
 Peace, for he cometh, O thou Goddess bright,
 What help wilt thou be unto me this night ? '

So murmured she, while ceaselessly she drew
 Her fingers through the strings, and fuller grew
 The tinkling music, but the beast drawn nigh
 Went slower still, and turning presently 82
 Began to move around them in a ring.
 And as he went, there fell a strange rattling
 Of his dry scales ; but as he turned, she turned,
 Nor failed to meet the eyes that on her burned
 With steadfast eyes, and, lastly, clear and strong
 Her voice broke forth in sweet melodious song :—

' O evil thing, what brought thee here
 To be a wonder and a fear 90

Unto the river-haunting folk ?
Was it the God of Day that broke
The shadow of thy windless trees,
Gleaming from golden palaces,
And shod with light and armed with light,
Made thy slime stone, and day thy night,
And drove thee forth unwillingly
Within his golden house to lie ?

‘ Or was it the slim messenger,
Who, treading softly, free from fear, 100
Beguiled thee with his smiling face
From out thy dim abiding place,
To follow him and set thee down
Midst of this twice-washed royal town ?

‘ Or, was it rather the dread Lord
Who slayeth without spear or sword,
And with the flower-culling maid
Of Enna, dwelleth in the shade,
Who, with stern voice compelling thee,
Hath set thee here, our bane to be ? 110

‘ Or was it Venus, seeking far
A sleepless guard ’gainst grief and war,
Who, journeying through thy dismal land,
Beside the heavy lake did stand,
And with no word, but very sight
Of tender limbs and bosom white,
Drew forth thy scaly feet and hard,
To follow over rock and shard ?

‘ Or rather, thy dull, waveless lake
Didst thou not leave for her dread sake,
Who, passing swift from glade to glade,
The forest-dwellers makes afraid 122
With shimmering of her silver bow
And dreadful arrows ? Even so
I bid thee now to yield to me,

Her maid, who overmastered thee,
 The three-formed dreadful one who reigns
 In heaven and the fiery plains,
 But on the green earth best of all.

‘Lo, now thine upraised crest let fall,
 Relax thy limbs, let both thine eyes 131
 Be closed, and bestial fantasies
 Fill thy dull head till dawn of day
 And we are far upon our way.’

As thus she sung the beast seemed not to hear
 Her words at first, but ever drew anear,
 Circling about them, and Medea’s face
 Grew pale unto the lips, though still the place
 Rung with the piercing sweetness of her song ;
 But slower soon he dragged his length along,
 And on his limbs he tottered, till at last 141
 All feebly by the wondering prince he passed,
 And whining to Medea’s feet he crept,
 Witheyes half closed, as though wellnigh he slept,
 And there before her laid his head adown ;
 Who, shuddering, on his wrinkled neck and brown
 Set her white foot, and whispered : ‘Haste,
 O love !

Behold the keys ; haste ! while the Gods above
 Are friendly to us ; there behold the shrine
 Where thou canst see the lamp of silver shine.
 Nay, draw not death upon both thee and me
 With fearless kisses ; fear, until the sea 152
 Shall fold green arms about us lovingly,
 And kindly Venus to thy keel be nigh.’

Then lightly from her soft side Jason stepped,
 While still upon the beast her foot she kept,
 Still murmuring gently many an unknown word,

As when through half-shut casements the brown
bird 158

We hearken when the night is come in June,
And thick-leaved woods are 'twixt us and his tune.

But Jason, going swiftly with good heart,
Came to the wished-for shrine built all apart
Midmost the temple, that on pillars stood
Of jasper green, and marble red as blood,
All white itself and carven cunningly
With Neptune bringing from the wavy sea
The golden shining ram to Athamas ;
And the first door thereof of silver was,
Wrought over with a golden glittering sun
That seemed well-nigh alike the heavenly one.
Such art therein the cunningest of men 171
Had used, which little Jason heeded then,
But thrusting in the lock the smallest key
Of those he bore, it opened easily ;
And then five others, neither wrought of gold,
Or carved with tales, or lovely to behold,
He opened ; but before the last one stayed
His hand, wherein the heavy key he weighed,
And pondering, in low muttered word, he said .—

‘ The prize is reached, which yet I somewhat
dread 180

To draw unto me ; since I know indeed,
That henceforth war and toil shall be my meed.—
Too late to fear, it was too late, the hour
I left the grey cliffs and the beechen bower,
So here I take hard life and deathless praise,
Who once desired nought but quiet days,
And painless life, not empty of delight ;
I, who shall now be quickener of the fight,
Named by a great name—a far-babbled name,

The ceaseless seeker after praise and fame. 190

'May all be well, and on the noisy ways
Still may I find some wealth of happy days.'

Therewith he threw the last door open wide,
Whose hammered iron did the marvel hide,
And shut his dazzled eyes, and stretched his hands
Out toward the sea-born wonder of all lands,
And plunged them deep within the locks of gold,
Grasping the fleece within his mighty hold.

Which when Medea saw, her gown of grey
She caught up from the ground, and drew away
Her wearied foot from off the rugged beast, 201
And while from her soft strain she never ceased,
In the dull folds she hid her silk from sight,
And then, as bending 'neath the burden bright,
Jason drew nigh, joyful, yet still afraid,
She met him, and her wide grey mantle laid
Over the fleece, whispering : 'Make no delay ;
He sleeps, who never slept by night or day
Till now ; nor will his charmed sleep be long.
Light-foot am I, and sure thine arms are strong ;
Haste, then ! No word ! nor turn about to gaze
At me, as he who in the shadowy ways 212
Turned round to see once more the twice-lost
face.'

Then swiftly did they leave the dreadful place,
Turning no look behind, and reached the street,
That with familiar look and kind did greet
Those wanderers, mazed with marvels and with
fear. 217

And so, unchallenged, did they draw anear
The long white quays, and at the street's end now
197 plunged them deep within] buried them deep in

Beheld the ships' masts standing row by row
 Stark black against the stars : then cautiously
 Peered Jason forth, ere they took heart to try
 The open starlit place ; but nought he saw
 Except the night-wind twitching the loose straw¹
 From half-unloaded keels, and nought he heard
 But the strange twittering of a caged green bird
 Within an Indian ship, and from the hill
 A distant baying : yea, all was so still,
 Somewhat they doubted, natheless forth they
 passed,

And Argo's painted sides they reached at last.²²⁹
 On whom down-looking, scarce more noise
 they heard

Than from the other ships ; some muttered word,
 Some creaking of the timbers, as the tide
 Ran gurgling seaward past her shielded side.
 Then Jason knelt, and whispered : ' Wise be ye,
 O fair companions on the pathless sea,
 But come, Erginus, Nestor, and ye twain
 Of Lacedæmon, to behold my gain ;²³⁸
 Take me amongst you, neither be afraid
 To take withal this gold, and this fair maid.
 Yare !—for the ebb runs strongly towards the sea,
 The east wind drives the rack to Thessaly,
 And lightly do such kings as this one sleep
 If now and then small watch their servants keep.'

Then saw Medea men like shadows grey
 Rise from the darksome decks, who took straight-
 way

With murmured joy, from Jason's outstretched²⁴⁷
 hands,

The conquered fleece, the wonder of all lands,
 While with strong arms he raised the royal maid,

249 raised] took

And in their hold the precious burthen laid,
 And scarce her dainty feet could touch the deck,
 Ere down he leapt, and little now did reck
 That loudly clanged his armour therewithal.

But, turning townward, did Medea call :—
 ‘ O noble Jason, and ye heroes strong,
 To sea, to sea ! nor pray ye loiter long ;
 For surely shall ye see the beacons flare
 Ere in mid stream ye are, and running fair
 On toward the sea with tide, and oar, and sail.
 My father wakes, nor bides he to bewail 260
 His loss and me ; I see his turret gleam
 As he goes towards the beacon, and down stream
 Absyrtus lurks before the sandy bar
 In mighty keel well manned and dight for war.’

But as she spoke, rattling the cable slipped
 From out the hawse-hole, and the long oars dipped
 As from the quays the heroes pushed away,
 And in the loosened sail the wind ’gan play ;
 But e’en as they unto the stroke leaned back,
 And Nauplius, catching at the main-sheet slack
 Had drawn it taut, out flared the beacon wide,
 Lighting the waves, and they heard folk who
 cried : 272

‘ Awake, awake, awake, O Colchian folk ! ’
 And all about the blare of horns outbroke,
 As watch-tower answered watch-tower down the
 stream,

Where far below they saw the bale-fires gleam ;
 And galloping of horses now they heard,
 And clang of arms, and cries of men afeard,
 For now the merchant mariners who lay
 About the town, thought surely an ill day 280
 Had dawned upon them while they slept at ease,

278 afeard] afeared

And, half awake, pushed madly from the quays
 With crash of breaking oars and meeting ships,
 And cries and curses from outlandish lips ;
 So fell the quiet night to turmoil sore,
 While in the towers, over the uproar,
 Melodiously the bells began to ring.

But Argo, leaping forward to the swing
 Of measured oars, and leaning to the breeze,
 Sped swiftly 'twixt the dark and whispering trees;
 Nor longer now the heroes silence kept, 291
 So joyously their hearts within them leapt,
 But loud they shouted, seeing the gold fell
 Laid heaped before them, and longed sore to tell
 Their fair adventure to the maids of Greece ;
 And as the mingled noises did decrease
 With added distance, and behind them night
 Grew pale with coming of the eastern light,
 Across the strings his fingers Orpheus drew,
 And through the woods his winged music flew :—

‘ O surely, now the fisherman 301
 Draws homeward through the water wan
 Across the bay we know so well,
 And in the sheltered chalky dell
 The shepherd stirs ; and now afield
 They drive the team with white wand peeled
 Muttering across the barley-bread
 At daily toil and dreary-head.

‘ And midst them all, perchance, my love
 Is waking, and doth gently move 310
 And stretch her soft arms out to me,
 Forgetting thousand leagues of sea ;
 And now her body I behold,

Unhidden but by hair of gold,
 And now the silver water kiss,
 The crown of all delight and bliss.
 And now I see her bind her hair
 And do upon her raiment fair,
 And now before the altar stand,
 With incense in her outstretched hand,
 To supplicate the Gods for me ; 321
 Ah, one day landing from the sea,
 Amid the maidens shall I hear
 Her voice in praise, and see her near,
 Holding the gold-wrapt laurel crown,
 'Midst of the shouting, wondering town !'

So sung he joyously, nor knew that they
 Must wander yet for many an evil day
 Or ever the dread Gods should let them come
 Back to the white walls of their long-left home.
 But on the shouting heroes gazed adown 331
 The foundress of their triumph and renown,
 And to her lover's side still drew anear,
 With heart now swelled with joy, now sick with
 fear,
 And cheeks now flushed with love, now pale and
 wan,
 As now she thought upon that goodly man,
 And now on the uncertain, dreadful Gods,
 And now upon her father, and the odds
 He well might raise against the reckless crew,
 For all his mighty power full well she knew ;
 No wonder therefore if her heart grew cold,
 And if her wretched self she did behold, 342

340 power full well] power well

341-2 And at that thought well might her heart grow cold,
 And well might she her wretched self behold,

Led helpless through some old familiar place,
 With none to turn on her a pitying face,
 Unto the death in life, she still might win ;
 And yet, if she should 'scape the meed of sin
 This once, the world was fair and bright enough,
 And love there was to lead her o'er the rough
 Of life, and love to crown her head with flowers,
 And fill her days and nights with happy hours.

Now swift beneath the oar-strokes Argo flew,
 While the sun rose behind them, and they drew
 Unto the river's mouth, nor failed to see 353
 Absyrtus' galley waiting watchfully
 Betwixt them and the white-topped turbid bar.
 Therefore they gat them ready now for war
 With joyful hearts, for sharp they sniffed the sea,
 And saw the great waves tumbling green and free
 Outside the bar upon the way to Greece,
 The rough green way to glory and sweet peace.

Then to the prow gat Jason, and the maid 361
 Must needs be with him, though right sore afraid,
 As nearing now the Colchian ship, they hung
 On balanced oars ; but the wild Arcas strung
 His deadly bow, and clomb into the top.

Then Jason cried : ' Absyrtus, will ye stop
 Our peaceful keel, or let us take the sea ?
 Soothly, have we no will to fight with thee
 If we may pass unfoughten, therefore say,
 What is it thou wilt have this dawn of day ? '

Now on the other prow Absyrtus stood,
 His visage red with eager wrathful blood,
 And in his right hand shook a mighty spear,
 And said : ' O seafarers, ye pass not here,
 For gifts or prayers, but if it must be so,
 Over our sunken bulwarks shall ye go ; 376

Nor ask me why, for thus my father wills,
 Yet, as I now behold you, my heart thrills
 With wrath indeed ; and hearken for what cause,
 That ye against all friendship and good laws
 Bear off my sister with you ; wherefore now
 Mars give you courage and a brazen brow !
 That ye may try this dangerous pass in vain,
 For soothly of your slaughter am I fain.'

Then Jason wrathfully threw up his head,
 But ere the shout came, fair Medea said,
 In trembling whisper thrilling through his ear :—

' Haste, quick upon them ! if before is fear,
 Behind is death ! ' Then Jason turning, saw
 A tall ship staggering with the gusty flaw, 390
 Just entering the long reach where they were,
 And heard her horns through the fresh morning
 air.

Then lifted he his hand, and with a cry
 Back flew the balanced oars full orderly,
 And toward the doomed ship mighty Argo passed ;
 Thereon Absyrtus shouted loud, and cast
 His spear at Jason, that before his feet
 Stuck in the deck ; then out the arrows fleet
 Burst from the Colchians ; and scarce did they
 spare

Medea's trembling side and bosom fair ; 400
 But Jason, roaring as the lioness
 When round her helpless whelps the hunters
 press,

Whirled round his head his mighty brass-bound
 spear,

That flying, smote the Prince beneath the ear,
 As Arcas' arrow sunk into his side.

Then falling, scarce he met the rushing tide,
 Ere Argo's mighty prow had thrust apart

The huddled oars, and through the fair ship's
heart

Had thrust her iron beak, and the green wave
Rushed in as rush the waters through a cave
That tunnels half a sea-girt lonely rock. 411

Then drawing swiftly backward from the shock,
And heeding not the cries of fear and woe,
They left the waters dealing with their foe ;
And at the following ship threw back a shout,
And seaward o'er the bar drave Argo out.

Then joyful felt all men as now at last
From hill to green hill of the sea they passed ;
But chiefly joyed Medea, as now grew
The Colchian hills behind them faint and blue,
And like a white speck showed the following
ship. 421

There 'neath the canopy, lip pressed to lip,
They sat and told their love, till scarce he
thought

What precious burden back to Greece he brought
Besides the maid, nor for his kingdom cared,
As on her beauty with wet eyes he stared,
And heard her sweet voice soft as in a dream,
When all seems gained, and trouble dead does
seem.

So passed this day, and she no less forgot
That wreck upon the bar, the evil spot, 430
Red with a brother's blood, where long was
stayed

The wrathful king as from the stream he weighed

409 and] then

After l. 428 the first edition inserts :

And on his face her red lips he could feel,
And round her panting sides his fingers steal.

The bleeding body of his well-loved son.

Lo in such wise their journey was begun,
And so began short love and long decay,
Sorrow that bides and joy that fleets away.

BOOK X

Argo cut off from the straits—The entry of the river—
The passage northward.

NIGHT came, but still on by the stars they sailed
Before the wind, till at the dawn it failed,
And faded soon the sunrise hue away,
Leaving the heavens colourless and grey,
And dull and lightless the decreasing swell
About the watery ways now rose and fell,
And Lynceus, looking back, no more beheld
The galley that so long the chase had held.
Then were all glad, and toiled on at the oar,
When now the drooping sails would help no more.

But soon before their way it seemed as though
A curtain hung they needs must journey
through, 12

A low black mist so brooded o'er the sea.
Then did they hold their hands, but presently,
Moving to meet them, did it hide from sight
The dog-vane and the maintop gilded bright,
Yea in heart-chilling waves it so enwound
The seafarers, that each man gazed around
And saw but shadows where his fellows were.
So with the windless swell did Argo fare 20
Two days with furled sails purposeless and blind,
And bearing heavy hearts ; the third, the wind

Sprung up at daybreak, and straight drove away
That hideous mist, that after sunrise lay
A heavy purple bank down in the west.

Then by the sun his way Erginus guessed,
For on no side could they see any land ;
But as upon the helm he set his hand
Such mighty light blazed out upon the prow,
That faint and yellow did the sunlight show
Beside it, and amidst it they beheld ³¹
The figure that ere now their hands had held
Anigh the Mysian shore ; and now it said :—

‘ O heroes, wherefore haste ye to be dead ?
Behold, while through the heart of yonder fog
I, Argo, drifted as an unsteered log,
Æetes passed us going towards the straits,
And now is lying ready by the gates ;
Nor with one ship alone, but with ten keels,
Raised from his subject kings and commonweals,
Abides your coming, hoping soon to see ⁴¹
Your bodies on the shore lie wretchedly,
While to the Gods he offers bulls and sheep ;
But your fair helper and your joy will keep,
That she in Æa unavenged may burn.

‘ But now the Gods, taking your swift return
Away from you, yet will not let you die ;
But bid you, taking heart, turn presently
Unto the northern shore of this ill sea ;
There by a mighty river shall ye be, ⁵⁰
Along whose sides dwell the Sarmatian folk,
Knowing no arts, untaught to bear the yoke
Of equal laws ; into this river’s mouth
Straight must ye enter, and forget the south,
And many unknown lands and unknown seas,
And deadly forests, vocal with no breeze,

Shall ye go wandering through, but long time
past,

Unto the seas ye know shall come at last,
And passing by the western garden fair
Toward the Italian shore, shall ye find there 60
Circe the wise, the wonder of all lands,
Thy father's sister, lady, at whose hands
Of late-wrought guilt shall ye be purified.

'And so, by many troubles being tried,
Unto Iolchos shall ye all come back
Except some few . nor there find any lack
Of much-desired wealth and babbling praise, .
And so each man depart unto such days
As the fates grant him, be they good or ill,
With death at last according to their will.' 70

With these last words she vanished quite away,
And these, left floating on that dawn of day,
Felt severed utterly from hoped-for things ,
Like some caged eagle that, with fluttering wings,
Beats at his bars, beholding far away
His windy eyrie up the mountain grey.
—A while ago, and every man nigh saw
The long white walls rise sunny without flaw
From out the curled white edges of the sea ;
Yea, almost felt as if they well might be 80
In fair Iolchos that same afternoon.
And now how many and many a glittering moon
Must fill her horns up, while their lives are spent
In unknown lands mid helpless dreariment !

But as his fellows, speechless and amazed,
Upon the weary sea so stood and gazed,
Spake Jason to them : ' Heroes, tell me where
Your hearts are gone, since helpless thus ye stare

On that which helpeth not ? in no such wise
A while ago, before Æetes' eyes 90
Ye smote the Colchian ship ; with other heart
Ye drave the dark blue clashers far apart ;
No eyes I saw like these upon the day,
When with the Colchian spears on every way,
Unto Mars' acre on a doubtful quest

We passed, and dared the worst to get the best.
' What will ye ? Is it then so hard a thing
That we, through many countries wandering,
Shall see unheard-of things, nor fail to come
When yet our blood is warm, back to our home ?
Be merry, think upon the lives of men, 101
And with what troubles threescore years and ten
Are crowded oft, yea, even unto him
Who sits at home, nor fears for life and limb,
But trembles the base slave unto a slave ;
Or holding trifles he is fain to save,
Sits pleasureless and wearing out his life,
Or with vain words wages disgraceful strife
That leads nowhither, till forgotten death
Seizes the babbler, choking out his breath. 110

' But ye—forget all—get ye to the oar,
And steer rejoicing to the northern shore,
Since we shall win such glory and renown,
That, coming home again to our fair town,
Those left behind shall count us all for lords,
And tremble, gazing at our sheathed swords.
Fair is the wind, the sunny dawn is clear,
Nor are we bound for Pluto's kingdom drear,
But for fair forests, plentiful of beasts,
Where, innocent of craft, with joyous feasts
The wise folk live as in the golden age, 121
Not reddening spears and swords in useless rage ;
Nor need they houses, but in fair-wrought cave

Their bodies from the winter's cold they save ;
 Nor labour they at all, or weave, or till,
 For everything the kind land bears at will.
 Doubt not at all that they will welcome us
 As very Gods, with all things plenteous.'

* So spake he, knowing nought of that same land;
 Natheless, they noting him as he did stand
 Beside Erginus, with unclouded face, 131
 Took heart again, and to the oars apace
 They gat and toiled, forgetting half the word
 That from great Argo's sprite ere now they
 heard,
 Nor thinking of the ills that they might meet,
 But of the day when their returning feet
 Should bear them, full of knowledge, wealth,
 and fame,
 Up to the royal hall wherefrom they came.

But Jason in his heart thought : ' Now, indeed,
 Of home and fame full little is my need, 140
 The days will change, and time will bring a day
 When through my beard are sprinkled locks of
 grey,

And love no more shall be enough for me,
 And no fair woman much delight shall be ;
 But little do we want when we are young,
 The bended knee and flattering double tongue,
 Which we, grown old, and drained of half our
 fire,

Knowing them false, do yet so much desire.'

But for his love, she, set quite free from fear
 Of frightful death, held life itself so dear, 150
 That where she went she scarcely heeded yet,
 For still she seemed to see the black pile set

For her undoing by the temple-gate ;
And seemed to see the thronging people wait
For her, who there to make the tragedy
Alone was wanting : then she saw anigh
His face, and with her fingers felt him toy,
And therewithal trembled for very joy,
And set aside for that time all her care, 159
So sweet was love, and life so blithe and fair.

Now northward Argo steered for two days
more,
Until at last they came in sight of shore,
And creeping on, they found a river-mouth,
That a long spit of land fenced from the south,
And turned due west ; and now, at ebb, full
strong
Turbid and yellow rolled its stream along,
That scarce could Argo stem it ; wherefore they,
It being but early, anchored till mid-day,
And as they waited, saw an eddy rise
Where sea joined river, and before their eyes
The battle of the waters did begin. 171
So, seeing the mighty ocean best therein,
Weighing their anchor, they made haste to man
Both oars and sails, and therewith plying, ran
With the first wave of the great conquering flood
Far up the stream, on whose banks forests stood,
Darkening the swirling water on each side.

And now between them swiftly did they glide,
And now no more they smelt the fresh salt sea,
Or heard the steady wind pipe boisterously
Through the strained rigging, neither with their
feet 181

Set wide, the pitching of their ship to meet,
Went to and fro ; for all was quiet now

But gurgling of the stream beside the prow,
 And flapping of the well-nigh useless sail,
 And from the black woods some faint dismal wail,
 Whether of man or beast they knew not well.

Then o'er their hearts a melancholy fell,
 And they began to think they might forget 189
 The quest whereon their hearts had once been set,
 Now half accomplished, and all wealth and fame,
 All memory of the land wherefrom they came,
 Their very names indeed, to wander on,
 Unseen, unheard of till their lives were done.

In such-like thoughts they anchored for the
 night,
 Nor slept they much, but wishing for daylight,
 About the deck they paced, or sat them down
 In longing thought of some fair merchant-town.

So sadly passed the weary night away,
 That, dreary, yet was noisier than the day;
 For all about them evil beasts 'gan stir 201
 At nightfall, and great soft-winged bats would
 whirr

About their raiment and their armour bright.
 And when the moon rose, and her crescent white
 Made the woods blacker, then from either shore
 They heard the thundering of the lion's roar,
 Now coming nigher, dying now away;
 And once or twice, as in the stream they lay
 A spear-cast from the shore, could they behold
 The yellow beast stalk forth, and, stark and
 bold, 210

Stand in the moonlight on the muddy beach.
 Then, though they doubted not their shafts
 could reach

His kingly heart, they held their hands, for here
 All seemed as in a dream, where deadly fear
 Is mingled with the most familiar thing ;
 And in the cup we see the serpent's sting,
 And common speech we answer with a scream.
 Moreover, sounds they heard they well might
 deem

To be men's voices ; but, whatso they were,
 Unto the river side they drew not near, 220
 Nor yet of aught like man did they have sight.

So dawned the day ; but like another night
 Unto their wearied eyes it seemed to be,
 Amid that solitude, where tree joined tree
 For ever, as it seemed ; and nathless, they
 Ran out the oars and gat them on their way
 Against the ebb, and little help the flood
 Gave them that day ; but yet for bad or good
 They laboured on, though still with less intent
 More hopeless past the changeless woods they
 went. 230

But every day, more and more sluggishly
 And shorter time, the water from the sea
 Ran up, and failed ere eve of the third day,
 Though slower took the downward stream its
 way,

Grown wide and dull, and here and there the
 wood

Would draw away and leave some dismal rood
 Of quaggy land about the river's edge,
 Where 'mid the oozes and decaying sedge
 There wallowed ugly, nameless, dull-scaled
 things. 239

These now the weary company of kings,
 As they passed by, could not endure to see
 Unscathed of arrows, turning lazily

Blue-gleaming slimy sides up in the sun,
 Whose death swift Atalanta first begun.
 For as anigh the prow she chanced to stand,
 Unto her bow did she set foot and hand,
 And strung it, and therefrom an arrow sent
 That through the belly of a monster went,
 Legged like a lizard, maned with long lank hair.
 He, screaming, straight arose from out his lair,
 With many another of his kith and kin, 251
 And swiftly getting to the water thin,
 Made for the ship; and though upon the way
 Some few among them lost the light of day,
 Smit by Thessalian arrows, yet the most
 The narrow strip of water fairly crossed,
 And scaled the ship's sides, and therewith began
 A fearful battle betwixt worm and man.
 Not long it dured; though Ceneus through the
 mail

Was bitten, and one monster's iron tail 260
 Smote down Asterion, whom Eribotes
 Made shift to save; but chiefly amid these
 She who had been the first to raise the strife
 Was hard bested, and scarce escaped with life.

One worm 'twixt ship and shore her arrow
 slew,

But ere her amazonian axe she drew,
 Another monster had got slimy hold
 Of her slim ankles, and cast fold on fold
 About her legs, and binding thigh to thigh,
 Wrapt round her sides, enfolding mightily
 Her foiled right hand, then raised aloft his crest
 Against her unembraced tender breast; 272
 But she, with one unarmed hand yet left free,
 Still strove to ward the blow, but giddily,
 Because the deadly rings still tighter grew

About her heart , yet as she fell, there flew
 A feathered javelin swiftly from the left,
 By Arcas desperately cast, that cleft
 The monster's head, and dulled his glittering
 eyes.

Then the glad Minyæ with joyous cries 280
 Cleared Argo's decks of all the monstrous things,
 As from the maiden's limbs the slimy rings
 Slacked and fell off : but she, so saved from
 death,

Sat weary by the mast, and drew glad breath,
 And vowed the grey and deadly thing should
 shine,

Wrought all of gold, within Diana's shrine,
 In woody fair Arcadia. But the rest,
 When they with poured-out wine the Gods had
 blest,

And flayed the slain worms, gat them to the oar,
 And 'gainst the sluggish stream slid past the
 shore. 290

But swifter the next day the river ran
 With higher banks, and now the woods began
 To be of trees that in their land they knew,
 And into clumps of close-set beeches grew,
 And oak-trees thinly spread, and there-between
 Fair upland hillocks well beset with green ;
 And 'neath the trees great herds of deer and neat,
 And sheep, and swine, fed on the herbage sweet,
 Seeming all wild as though they knew not man,
 For quite untented here and there they ran,
 And while two great bucks raised the armed brow
 Each against each (since time of fight was now)
 About them would the swine squeal, and the
 sheep 303

In close-drawn flock their faint republic keep,

With none to watch : nor saw they fence or fold,
 Nor any husbandry did they behold,
 But the last men their wearied eyes had seen
 Were those strong swimmers in the Phasis green.

So seeing now these beasts in such plenty,
 It seemed good unto the Minyæ 310
 To make provision thereof for their need.

And drawing Argo up through sedge and reed,
 They made her fast, while divers took the land.
 Arcas the hunter, Idas strong of hand,
 White Atalanta, wise Eurytion,
 Far-seeing Lynceus, and the Sminthian's son,
 Keen Theseus, with Pirithous his mate,
 Clitius, whose swift shaft smote as sure as fate,
 Ætalides, the runner of the plain,
 Phocus, whose sling was seldom whirled in vain,
 Cæneus the cragsman, Periclimenes, 321
 And Apheus, haunter of the close-set trees.

So forth these set, and none of them had lack
 Of spear or bow, or quiver at the back,
 As through the land they went with wary mirth,
 For they rejoiced once more to feel the earth
 Beneath their feet, while on their heads fell down
 The uncupped acorn, and the long leaves brown,
 For on that land the sad mid-autumn lay,
 And earlier came the sunset day by day 330

But now unto their hunting gave they heed,
 And of the more part happy was the speed,
 And soon to Argo did they turn again,
 Laden with that they had set forth to gain,
 Of deer and beasts the slaughtered carcasses
 Upborne on interwoven boughs of trees,

With whom came Theseus not, nor Arcas came,
 Nor yet Ætalides (who had the fame

Next Atalanta among all the rest
 For swiftness, she being easily the best). 340
 There waiting till the night, yet none the more
 Came down those three unto the river's shore,
 Nor through the night : but swift Ætalides
 At dawn they saw come running through the
 trees,

With Arcas far behind, and Theseus slim
 The last of all, but straining every limb
 To be their equal : empty-handed they
 Came back to Argo on that dawn of day,
 And on being asked, a short tale had to tell.

Unto their part to chase a great buck fell,
 That led them far, and he at last being lost,
 They sat them down with nought to pay the cost
 Of all their travail, so being set, they heard
 A hubbub of strange voices, and afeard 354
 Leapt to their feet, and presently they saw
 Strange folk, both men and women, toward them
 draw,

Who spread about them as to stop their flight
 On all hands more than they durst lightly fight.

So being thus trapped they fain had spoke
 them fair,
 But knowing not their tongue, they yet had care
 To speak with smiles as though they feared not
 aught, 361

Asking for food by signs, which soon was
 brought ;

No flesh, but roots and nuts, whereof they ate,
 And so by signs until the day grew late
 They dealt together, making clear indeed
 Each unto each but little of their need ;
 At last of their departure were they fain,
 But, being stayed, they durst not strive in vain

For fear of worse ; but now, the night being
come,

The wild folk seemed to think that place their
home 370

Just as another, and there gat to sleep,
Nor yet upon the Greeks a watch did keep
To stop their going ; ' So,' said Arcas, ' we,
An hour after midnight, warily
Stole from among them, neither gave they chase,
Being still asleep like beasts, in that same place ;
And for their semblance, neither were they clad,
Nor in their hands a spear or sword they had,
Or any brass or iron, but long slings, 379
And scrips of stones, and ugly stone-set things
Most like to knives, and clubs of heavy wood ;
Soft-voiced they were, and gentle of their mood,
And goodly made as such wild folk may be,
But tanned with sun and wind ; there did we see
Old men and young, and women old and young,
With many children scattered there among,
All naked, and with unshorn yellow hair 387
Blowing about ; and sooth we deem they were
Houseless and lawless, without town or king,
Knowing no Gods, and lacking everything.'

So said he, but Medea spoke, and said :—

' O heroes, surely by all likelihood
These are the folk of whom I erst heard tell
In Ææa, where to me it oft befell
To speak with many men from many lands,
Long ere ye crossed the Phasis' yellow sands.
' Of these I learned more tongues of speaking
men 397

Than ye might deem men spoke, who told me then
Of such as these, that ye have seen but now.
And yet indeed some Gods these folk do know.

The Sun, the Moon, the mother of the earth,
 And more perchance, and days they have of mirth
 When these they honour ; yea, and unto these
 Within their temples, groves of ancient trees,
 Clad but in leaves, and crowned in solemn wise,
 They offer strangers up in sacrifice,
 Which was your doom had not the Gods been
 kind,
 Who for your bodies other graves will find.'

But when they heard her, glad they were indeed
 That they from such a bondage had been freed.
 And, day being fully come, they loosed from
 shore, 411

And 'gainst the stream all bent unto the oar.
 All day they toiled, and every mile of way
 Still swifter grew the stream, so on that day
 Few leagues they made ; and still the banks were
 fair,

But rising into scarped cliffs here and there,
 Where screamed the great ger-falcon as they
 passed,

And whence the sooty swifts about the mast
 Went sweeping, with shrill cries at that new
 sight.

Nought happed that day worth record, but at
 night, 420

When they were moored, and sound of splashing
 oars

Had ceased, and stiller grew the upland shores, ;
 Another sound they heard besides the stream
 That gurgled past them, that to them did seem
 Like sound of feet of men who pass to war,
 Rising and falling as the wind from far

Would bear it on or drop it in the dark.
 So, while with strained ears, they stood to hark
 The murmur, as folk use, scarce sure they heard
 That which already inward fear had stirred,
 Erginus spoke : ' O heroes, fear ye nought,
 This is not death, though ye to toil are brought ;
 This noise is but the river as it falls 433
 Over its mountainous and iron walls,
 Which, being once passed, both calm and deep
 will be

The pent-up stream, and Argo easily
 Will stem it ; but or ere we come thereto,
 Needs must we heave her up and make her go
 Over the hard earth, till the falls are past
 Eat therefore now, and sleep, that ye may last
 Through this and other toils, and so may come,
 Through many labours, back unto your home.'

So, landing, many a pine-torch did they light,
 And made the dusky evening strange and bright,
 And there a mighty fire did they pile,
 And set the flesh thereto, and in a while,
 When all was ready, did they offer up
 That which the Gods claimed, pouring out a cup
 Of red wine to them from a new-pierced skin.
 Then in that lonely land did they begin 450
 Their feast, and first the flesh to Jason gave,
 And next to her who all their souls did save
 Far up the Phasis on that other day,
 And then unto the swift Arcadian May
 - The guarded treasure of the trim-shod queen.
 Then to the godlike singer, set between
 The twin Laconian stars, and then to these ;
 And then to Arcas, haunter of the trees,
 Theseus, Pirithous, Erginus true, 459
 435 being once passed] being passed

The North-wind's sons, the cleavers of the blue;
 And all the kings being satisfied in turn,
 With vain desires 'gan their hearts to burn,
 So stirred within them wine and changing speech.

But unto him his harp did Orpheus reach,
 And smote the strings, and through the ancient
 trees

Rang the heart-piercing honied melodies :—

' Alas ! for Saturn's days of gold,
 Before the mountain men were bold
 To dig up iron from the earth
 Wherewith to slaughter health and mirth,
 And bury hope far underground. 471
 When all men needed did abound
 In every land ; nor must they toil,
 Nor wear their lives in strife to foil
 Each other's hands, for all was good,
 And no man knew the sight of blood.

' With all the world man had no strife,
 No element against his life
 Was sworn and bitter ; on the sea,
 Dry-shod, could all walk easily ; 480
 No fire there was but what made day,
 Or hidden in the mountains grey ;
 No pestilence, no lightning flash,
 No over-mastering wind, to dash
 The roof upon some trembling head.

' Then the year changed, but ne'er was dead,
 Nor was the autumn-tide more sad
 Than very spring ; and all unclad
 Folk went upon the harmless snow,
 For not yet did mid-winter know 490
 The biting frost and icy wind,
 The very east was soft and kind.

' And on the crown of July days,

All heedless of the mid-day blaze,
 Unshaded by the rosy bowers,
 Unscorched beside the tulip flowers.
 The snow-white naked girl might stand ;
 Or fearless thrust her tender hand
 Amidst the thornless rose-bushes.

‘ Then, ’mid the twilight of the trees 500
 None feared the yellow beast to meet ;
 Smiling to feel their languid feet
 Licked by the serpent’s forkèd tongue.
 For then no clattering horn had rung
 Through those green glades, or made afraid
 The timid dwellers in the shade.
 No lust of strength nor fear of death
 Had driven men, with shortened breath,
 The stag’s wide-open eyes to watch ;
 No shafts to slay, no nets to catch, 510
 Were yet ; unyoked the neat might play
 On untilled meads, and mountains grey,
 Unshorn, the silly sheep might rove.

‘ Nor knew that world consuming love,
 Mother of hate, or envy cold,
 Or rage for fame, or thirst for gold,
 Or longing for the ways untried,
 That ravening and unsatisfied,
 Draw shortened lives of men to Hell.

‘ Alas ! what profit now to tell 520
 The long unweary lives of men
 Of past days—threescore years and ten,
 Unbent, unwrinkled, beautiful,
 Regarding not death’s flower-crowned skull,
 But with some damsel intertwined
 In such love as leaves hope behind.

‘ Alas, the vanished days of bliss !

Will no God send some dream of this,
That we may know what it has been ?

‘ Oh, thou, the chapleted with green, 530
Thou purple-stained, but not with blood,
Who on the edge of some cool wood
Forgettest the grim Indian plain,
And all the strife and all the pain,
While in thy sight the must foams out,
And maid and man, with cry and shout,
Toil while thou laughest, think of us,
And drive away these piteous,
Formless, and wailing thoughts, that press
About our hour of happiness. 540

‘ Lyæus, King ! by thee alone
To song may change our tuneless moan,
The murmur of the bitter sea
To ancient tales be changed by thee.
By thee the unnamed smouldering fire
Within our hearts turns to desire
Sweet, amorous, half satisfied ;
Through thee the doubtful years untried
Seem fair to us and fortunate,
In spite of death, in spite of fate.’ 550

He ceased, and bent his head above the wine :
Then, as he raised his eyes they saw them shine
In the red torchlight with unwilling tears,
And their hearts too, with thoughts of vanished
years

Were pensive, as at ending of his song
They heard the bubbling river speed along,
Nor did they miss that doubtful noise to hear
The rising night-wind through the branches bear,
Till sleep fell on them, and the watch alone

Waked in that place, and heard the distant moan
 Grow louder as the dead night stiller grew,
 And fuller of all fear, till daylight drew 562
 A faint wan streak between the thinner trees,
 And in their yellowing foliage the breeze
 Made a new sound, that through their waking
 dream
 Like to the surging sea well-nigh did seem.

But the full day being come, all men awake,
 Fresh hold upon the oars began to take,
 Stemming the stream, that now at every mile
 Swifter and shallower ran, and in a while 570
 Above all noises did they hear that roar,
 And saw the floating foam borne past the shore,
 So but ten leagues they made upon that day,
 And on the morrow, going on their way,
 They went not far, for underneath their keel
 Some once or twice the hard rock did they feel,
 And looking on ahead, the stream could see
 White with the rapids ; therefore warily
 Some mile or two they went at a slow pace
 And stayed their course where they beheld a place
 Soft-sloping to the river ; and there all, 581
 Half deafened by the noises of the fall
 And bickering rapids, left the ashen oar,
 And spreading over the well-wooded shore
 Cut rollers, laying on full many a stroke,
 And made a capstan of a mighty oak,
 And so drew Argo up, with hale and how,
 On to the grass, turned half to mire now.

Thence did they toil their best, in drawing her
 Beyond the falls, whereto being come anear,
 They trembled when they saw them, for from
 sight 591

The rocks were hidden by the spray-clouds white,
Cold, wretched, chilling, and the mighty sound
Their heavy-laden hearts did sore confound ;
For parted from all men they seemed, and far
From all the world, shut out by that great bar.

Moreover, when with toil and pain, at last
Unto the torrent's head they now had passed,
They sent forth swift *Ætalides* to see 599
What farther up the river there might be.

Who going twenty leagues, another fall
Found, with great cliffs on each side, like a wall,
But 'twixt the two, another unbarred stream
Joined the main river, therefore did they deem,
When this they heard, that they perforce must
try

This smoother branch ; so somewhat heavily
Argo they launched again, and gat them forth
Still onward toward the winter and the north.

BOOK XI

The passage northward continued—Argo drawn overland—
The winter by the northern river.

Now might the *Minyæ* hoist up to the breeze
Their well-wrought sail, for barren of all trees
The banks were now become, not rising high
Above the deep green stream that sluggishly
Strove with the strenuous Argo's cleaving stem.

So after all their toil was rest to them
A little while, and on the deck they sat,
Not wholly sad, and talked of this and that,
Or watched the restless fishes turn and wind,
Or the slim kestrel hanging in the wind, 10
Or the wild cattle scouring here and there

About the plain ; for in a plain they were,
Edged round with hills, with quaggy brooks cleft
through,

That 'mid their sedges toward the river drew,
And harboured noisome things, and death to man.
But looking up stream, the green river ran
Unto their eyes, from out the mountains high,
For 'twixt no pass could they behold the sky,
Though at the mountain's foot, far through the
plain, 19

They saw the wandering river shine again,
Then vanish wholly, therefore through their ease,
With fear did they the jealous Gods appease.

Natheless, for two days did they speed along,
Not toiling aught, and cheered with tale and song,
But the third noonday, bringing them anear
The mountains, turned to certain grief their fear,
For now they saw the stream, grown swift but
deep, 27

Come from a cavern in the mountain steep,
Nor would it help them aught upon that tide
To heave the swift ship out on either side,
For all that plain the mountain ridge bestrode,
And scarcely could a horseman find a road
Through any pass into the farther land.

Then 'mid the downcast men did Jason stand,
And lifting up his voice, said : ' Minyæ,
Why right and left upon this plain look ye,
Where dwell but beasts or beast-like men alone ?
Look rather to that heap of rugged stone,
Pierced with the road that leadeth to the north.
Yea, if from very hell this stream runs forth,
Let us go thither, bearing in our hands 41
This golden, hard-won marvel of all lands.
Yet, since not death it bears, but living things,

Shall we not reach thereby the sea that rings
The whole world round, and so make shift to reach
Sunny Eubœa, and fair Argo beach
Before Iolchos, having lost no whit
Of all our gains ? Or else here must we sit .
Till hunger slays us on some evil day,
Or wander till our raiment falls away 50
From off our bodies, and we, too, become
Like those ye saw, not knowing any home,
Voiceless, desiring nought but daily food,
And seeking that like beasts within the wood,
Each for himself. And all our glory gone,
Our names but left upon some carven stone
In Greece, still growing fainter day by day.
And this work wrought within the sunny bay,
Nor yet without the help of Gods, shall lie
A wonder to the wild beasts passing by, 60
While on her fallen masts the sedge-birds sing,
Unseen of men, a clean forgotten thing '

So spake he, setting courage in their hearts
To try the unknown dark, and to their parts
All gat them swiftly, and they struck the mast,
And deftly steered from out the sunlight passed
Into the cold, bat-haunted cavern low, 67
And, thrusting out with poles, made shift to go
Against the stream, that with a hollow sound
Smote Argo's stem. Then Jason, looking round,
Trembled himself, for now, indeed, he thought,
Though to the toiling heroes he said nought :—
' What do we, if this cavern narrows now,
Or over falls these burrowing waters flow,
And drive us back again into the sun,
Cursing the day this quest was first begun,
Or somewhat traps us here, as well it may,
And ends us all, far from the light of day ? '

Therewith he bade them light the torches up,
 And to the mountain Gods to pour a cup, 80
 And one unto the river Gods, and pray
 That they might come into the light of day.
 When they had pierced the mountain through
 and through.

So from the torches trains of sparkles flew,
 And strangely flashed their arms in that dark
 place,

And white and haggard showed each anxious face
 Against those dripping walls of unknown stone.

But now in Jason's hand the cup outshone,
 Full of red wine, pressed by the Grecian sea,
 And lifting high his hand, he cried : ' O ye,
 Both Gods and nymphs who in this wild land
 dwell, 91

In hill or river, henceforth may ye tell
 How through your midst have passed the Minyæ;
 And if, ye helping, the cold northern sea
 We safely reach, and our desired home,
 Thither the fame and fear of you shall come,
 And there a golden-pillared house shall stand,
 Unto our helpers in this savage land.

Nor when we reach the other side of this
 Grim cavern, due observance shall ye miss,
 For whatso on the teeming plain we snare,
 Slain with due rites shall smoke before you there.'

So spake he, and twice poured the fragrant
 wine ; 103

But they, well-pleased to have the gift divine,
 And noting well his promises, took heed
 Unto his prayers, and gave the heroes speed.
 Then Jason straightway bade more torches light,
 And Argo pushed along, flared through the night
 Of the dank cavern, and the dull place rang

With Grecian names, as loud the heroes sang,
For hope had come into their hearts at last
So through the winding cave three days they
passed. 112

But on the fourth day Lynceus gave a cry,
Smiting his palms together, who could spy,
Far off, a little white speck through the dark,
As when the 'lated traveller sees the spark
Of some fair-lighted homestead glitter bright.
But soon to all men's eyes the joyous sight
Showed clear, and with redoubled force they
pushed 119

Swift Argo forth, who through the water rushed
As though she longed for daylight too and air.
And so within an hour they brought her there,
And on the outer world the sun shone high,
For it was noon ; so mooring presently,
On the green earth they clean forgot their pain,
For joy to feel the sweet soft grass again,
And see the fair things of the world, and feel
The joyous sunlight that the sick can heal,
And soft tormenting of the western wind.

And there for joy about their heads they
twined 130

The yellow autumn flowers of the field,
And of untimely sorrow were they healed
By godlike conquering wine ; nor yet forgot
Their promise to the Gods, but on that spot,
Of turf and stones they built up altars twain,
And sent the hunters forth, and not in vain ;
For Atalanta, swifter than a man,
Arcas, and mighty Theseus, overran
A white high-crested bull, and tough cords threw
About his horns, and so by main force drew
The great beast to the altars, where the knife

Of wise Asclepius ended his hot life. 142
And there they feasted far into the night.

But when their toil the next returning light
Brought back to them, they gat unto the oar,
While Jason anxiously scanned either shore ;
For now the stream was narrowing apace,
And little more than just enough of space
Was left the oars ; but deep it ran and slow,
And through a like flat grassy plain did go
As that which ere its burrowing it had cleft ;
But lower were the hills, and on the left 152
So low they grew, they melted quite away
To woody swells before the end of day.

Full many a league upon that day they made,
And the next day the long oars down they laid,
For at their back the steady south-west blew,
And low anigh their heads the rain-clouds flew ;
Therefore they hoisted up their sail to it,
And idle by the useless oars did sit, 160
Watching the long wave from their swift sea-
plough

Sweep up the low green bank, for soothly now,
A pebble ill-thrown by a stripling's hand
From Argo's deck had lighted on the land ;
And yet far inland still they seemed to be,
Nor noted aught to tell them of the sea.

So on that night, for thought of many things,
Full little sleep fell on the troubled kings ;
But Argus slept, and at the dawn he dreamed,
Not wholly sleeping, and to him it seemed
That one said to him : ' Where is now become
The cunning that thou learnedst in thine home,
O wise artificer ? What dost thou here, 173
While in thy fellows' hearts is gathering fear ?
Now from the north thou seest this river flow,

Why doubttest thou to find another go
 Into the cold green icy northern sea ?
 Lo ! if thou willest well to trust in me,
 About the noontide of this very day,
 At the wood's end I bid thee Argo stay, 180
 And from her straightway let the Minyæ land
 And take the adze and wood-axe in the hand,
 And let them labour hard, with thee to guide,
 Until on wheels thy well-built keel shall glide ;
 And this being done as pleases thy wise mind,
 Doubt not a northern-flowing stream to find,
 For certainly some God shall show it thee.
 And if thou wishest now to ask of me,
 No dream I am, but lovely and divine,
 Whereof let this be unto thee a sign, 190
 That when thou wak'st the many-coloured bow
 Across the world the morning sun shall throw,
 But me indeed thine eyes shall not behold.'

Then he, awaking in the morning cold,
 A sprinkle of fine rain felt on his face,
 And leaping to his feet, in that wild place,
 Looked round and saw the morning sunlight
 throw
 Across the world the many-coloured bow,
 And trembling knew that the high Gods indeed
 Had sent the Messenger unto their need. 200
 And when the Minyæ, running out the oars
 That windless morning, found them touch the
 shores
 On either side, then ere one said a word,
 He cried, and said : ' O Jason, chief and lord,
 And ye, fair fellows, to no bitter end
 Our quest is come ; but this sharp keel shall
 send

A glittering foam-heap up in the wide sea,
 If ye will hear my words and trust in me.'

Therewith he told them of that dream divine,
 And of the many-coloured arched sign, 210
 And gladdened all their hearts, for well they
 knew

That some God helped them, and straightway
 they threw

Hawsers ashore, wherewith their keel to tow,
 And swiftly through the water made her go,
 Until they reached the ending of the wood,
 Just at the noonday, and there thought it good
 To rest till morning but at dawn of day
 Gat forth, and mighty blows began to lay
 On many a tree, making the tall trunks reel,
 That ne'er before had felt the woodman's steel.

So many days they laboured, cutting down
 The smooth grey beeches, and the pine-trees 222
 brown,
 And cleft them into planks and beams four-
 square.

And so, with Argus guiding all things there,
 A stage with broad wheels nigh the stream they
 made;

And then from out the water Argo weighed
 Little by little, dealing cunningly,
 Till on the stage the great black ship did lie,
 And all things waited for the setting forth
 Unto some river flowing toward the north.

But midst all this, as painfully they wrought,
 Passed twenty days, and on their heads was
 brought 232

The first beginning of the winter cold ;
 For now the wind-beat twigs had lost their hold

Of the faint yellow leaves, and thin and light
 The forest grew, and colder night by night,
 Or soaked with rain, and swept with bitter wind,
 Or with white creeping mist made deaf and blind.

Meanwhile for long there came no sign at all,
 Nor yet did sight of man to them befall,
 To guide them on their way, though through the
 trees, 241

Singly at times, at times in twos and threes,
 Both for their daily flesh they hunted oft,
 And also fain of fells to clad them soft,
 And guard their bodies from the coming cold ;
 Yet never any man did they behold,
 Though underneath the shaft and hunting-spear,
 Fell many a stag, and shuffling crafty bear,
 And strange the Minyæ showed in shaggy spoil.

But now, at ending of their woodwright's toil,
 It chanced Argus' self alone to go, 251
 One bitter day, when the first dusty snow
 Was driven through the bare boughs from the
 east,

In hot chase of the honey-loving beast
 Far from his fellows : him he brought to bay
 Nigh to the dusk of that quick-darkening day,
 Deep in the forest 'mid a clump of yews,
 And ere the red-eyed beast again could choose
 To fight or flee, ran in, and thrust his spear
 Into his heart ; then fell the shaggy bear,
 As falls a landslip by the mining sea, 261
 With grass and bracken, and wind-bitten tree,
 And Argus, drawing out his two-edged knife,
 Let out the last spark of his savage life ;
 But as he arose, he heard a voice that said :—
 ' Good-luck, O huntsman, to thine hardihead,
 Well met thou art to me, who wander far

On this first winter night that shows no star.'

Then looking up, he saw a maid draw nigh,
Like those who by Thermodon live and die ; 270
Her legs and arms with brazen scales were clad,
Well-plated shoes upon her feet she had,
And fur-lined, gold-wrought raiment to the knee,
And on her head a helm wrought royally ;
In her slim hand a mighty bow she bore,
And at her back well-feathered shafts good store,
And in her belt a two-edged cutting sword.

Then straightly answered Argus to her word :—

'Lady, not far hence are my fellows stayed, 279
But on hard earth this night will they be laid,
And eat the flesh of beasts their hands have slain.

For from the sea we come, to meet again
The ocean that the round world rings about,
Still wandering on, in trouble and in doubt.

'Nay,' said she, 'let us set on through the wood,
For food and fire alone to me are good,
And guarded sleep among such folk as thee,
For being alone, I fear the enemy,
The savage men our bands are wont to chase
Through these wild woods, from tangled place
to place.' 290

Then Argus swiftly flayed off the bear's hide,
And through the wood went with her side by
side ;

But long ere they could reach the skirts of it,
Across the world the wings of night 'gan flit ;
Then blindly had he stumbled through the place,
But still the damsel went before a pace,
Leading him on ; and as she went, she shed
A faint light round, but no word Argus said,
Because he deemed she was a thing divine,
And in his heart still thought upon the sign.

So went the twain till nigh the woods were past,
 And the new-risen moon slim shadows cast
 Upon the thin snow, and the windless sky
 Was cleared, and all the stars shone frostily.
 Therewith she stopped, and turned about on him,
 And with the sight his dazzled eyes did swim,
 So was she changed, for from her raiment light
 Her rosy limbs showed 'gainst the wintry white,
 Not shrinking from the snow ; her arms were
 bare,

Her head unarmed set round with yellow hair,
 And starred with unnamed dainty glimmering
 things ;

From her two shoulders many-coloured wings
 Rose up, and fanning in the frosty night,
 Shone as they moved with sparkles of strange
 light ;

And on an ivory rod within her hand
 A letter bound round by a golden band
 He saw. Then to the dazed man she said :—
 ' Argus, be glad, and lifting up thine head,
 Look through these few last trees upon the plain,
 Smooth and unseamed, though never crossed by
 wain,

And thank the Gods that led you here at last,
 For in no long time shall the leagues be passed
 'Twixt you and a swift river running north.

But now next morn at daybreak get ye forth,
 And labour all ye may, for see the sky
 How clear it is—the few light clouds are high,
 And from the east light blows the frosty wind ;
 Firm will the way be now, nor ill to find,
 But surely in few days will come the snow,
 And all the plain, so smooth and even now,
 Shall be swept into drifts impassable.

And now I bid thee heed the great downs well
Thou seest bar the northern way to thee ;
Left of the moon a wide pass thou mayst see ;
Look—where the yew-trees o'er the whitened
grass

Mix with the dark sky : make ye for that pass,
While yet endures the east wind and the frost,
And in your journey shall ten days be lost,
If that ye labour hard : but coming there,
Shall ye behold a clear green river fair, 340
Unfrozen yet, swift-running, that will hold
Great Argo well : now at my word be bold,
And set her therein, and the black ship tow
Adown the stream, though not far shall ye go,
But reaching a great forest, bide ye there
And there the coming unknown winter bear.
The days shall darken, the north-wind shall blow
And all about shall swirl the drifting snow,
And your astonished eyes shall soon behold
Firm earth and river one with binding cold,
And in mid-winter then shall ye be shut ; 351
But ere that haps shall ye build many an hut,
And dwell there as ye may, until the spring
Unchains the streams, and quickens everything
Then get ye down the river to the sea.

‘No doubt thou aught since thou beholdest me,
For I indeed am Iris ; but farewell,
For of my finished message must I tell
To her that sent me to this dreary place.’

Thus spake she, and straightway before his
face

She spread her fair wings wide, and from the earth
Rose upwards toward the place that gave her
birth.

Still growing faint and fainter 'neath the moon,
 Till from his wondering eyes she vanished soon.
 But she being gone, he gat him straight away
 Unto his fellows, bidding them 'gainst day
 Be ready to set forth, and told his tale.

And they, not fearing that his word should fail,
 Gat them to sleep, and ere the late dawn came,
 By the faint starlight, and the flickering flame
 Of their own watch-fires were upon the way. 371

So at the cables toiled all men that day
 In bands of twenty, and strong shoulders bore
 The unused yoke, and laboured very sore,
 And yet with all their toil few miles they made,
 Though 'gainst that bitter labour sweet hope,
 weighed,

Was found the heavier, and their hearts were
 cheered

With wine and food ere the noontide they neared;
 Nor as they laboured did the Thracian spare
 To cast his music on the frosty air, 380
 That therewith ringing, gladdened every heart.
 So till the evening did each man his part,
 When all that night they slept, and at daybreak
 The twisted cables in strong hands did take
 And laboured on, not earning warriors' meed,
 But like some carl's unkempt and rugged steed,
 That to the town drags his corn-laden wain.

But neither was the heavenly word in vain,
 For as the yew-clad hill they drew anear
 The grey-eyed keen Messenian could see clear,
 From the bare top of a great ashen-tree, 391
 The river running to the northern sea,
 Showing all dull and heavy 'gainst the snow,

And when the joyful tidings they did know,
 Light grew their hearts indeed, and scarcely less
 They joyed than he who, lying all helpless
 In dreary prison, sees his door ope wide,
 And half-forgotten friends stand by his side.

So on the tenth day through the pass they
 drew 399

Their strange ship-laden wain, and came unto
 A deep dark river, their long-promised road ;
 Then from the car they slipped its heavy load,
 And when safe in the stream the keel had slid,
 They with strong axes their own work undid,
 And to the Goddess a great altar made
 Of planks and beams, foursquare, and thereon
 laid

A white wild bull, and barley cakes, and spice,
 Not sparing gold and goodly things of price ;
 And fire being set thereto, and all things done
 That they should do, by a faint mid-day sun,
 Seaward they turned, and some along the shore
 With lightened hearts the hempen tow-ropes
 bore, 412

And some on Argo's deck abode their turn.

But now did Jason's heart within him burn
 To show his deeds to other men than these,
 Nor did he quite forget the palaces
 Of golden Æa, long left, as a dream,
 Or Æson's beauteous house, whose oaken beam
 Cleft the dark wintry river, as they went
 With longing eyes and hearts still northward
 bent, 420

And fain he was to see his dainty bride,
 That wrapt in muffling furs sat by his side,
 Sit 'neath some heavy rustling summer tree,
 Thin clad, to drink the breezes from the sea.

Now the next day the great oak-wood they
 reached,
 And as the Goddess bade them, there they beached
 Their sea-beat ship, on which from side to side
 They built a roof against the snowy tide, 428
 And round about her, huts wherein to dwell,
 When on their heads the full midwinter fell,
 And round the camp a wooden wall they made,
 That by no men or beasts they might be frayed.
 Meanwhile, the frost increased, and the thin snow
 From off the iron ground the wind did blow,
 And in the cold, dark stream, from either bank
 The ice stretched forth, at last, ere the sun sank,
 One bitter day, low grew the clouds and dun
 A little northward of the setting sun, 438
 Wherefrom, at nightfall, sprung a furious blast,
 That, ere the middle of the night was past,
 Brought up the snow from some untrodden land,
 Joyless and sunless, where in twilight stand,
 Amid the fleecy drift with faces wan,
 Giants immovable by God or man.

So 'mid the many changes of the night,
 The silent snow fell till the world was white,
 And to those southland folk entrapped, forlorn
 The waking was upon the morrow morn,
 And few were light of foot enough to go
 Henceforth about the woods their darts to
 throw 450
 At bird or beast, though, as the wild-fowl passed
 South o'er their camp, yet flew they not so fast
 As Arcas' arrows, and the elk at bay
 Deep in the forest, seldom found a way
 To 'scape from Jason's mighty well-steeled spear,
 And Atalanta's feet outran the deer
 And slew him, tangled in the wreathed drift.

Nor for the rest, did they yet lack the gift
 Of sunny Bacchus, but by night and day,
 By firelight passed the snowy time away,
 Forgetting not their fathers, or the time
 When all the world still dwelt in equal clime,
 But each to each amid the wine-cups told
 Unwritten, half-forgotten tales of old. 464

BOOK XII

The heroes reach the northern sea · and pass unknown
 lands, and seas without land, till they come at last to the
 pillars of Hercules.

Most pitiless and stark the winter grew
 Meanwhile, beneath a sky of cloudless blue,
 And sun that warmed not, till they nigh forgot
 The green lush spring, the summer rich and hot,
 The autumn fragrant with slow-ripening fruit,
 Till each grew listless, dull to the heart's root,
 For day passed day, and yet no change they saw
 In the white sparkling plain without a flaw,
 No cloud, no change within the sunny sky,
 Or in the wind, that rose at noon, to die 10
 Before the sunset, and no change at all
 In the drear silence of the dead nightfall

Ten weeks they bode there, longing for the
 spring,
 And to the hearts of some the thought would
 cling
 That thus they should be till their lives were past,
 And into hopeless bonds that land was cast;
 But on a day the wind, that rose at noon,
 Died not at night, and the white, sharp-edged
 moon,
 Just as the west had given it to sight, 19

Was hidden from the watchers of the night
 By fleecy clouds, and the next dawn of day
 Broke o'er the Minyæ colourless and grey,
 With gusts of fitful wind 'twixt south and east,
 That with the day grew steadier and increased,
 Until a south-west gale blew o'er the snow,
 And northward drove the steel-blue clouds and
 low.

And on that night the pattering of the rain
 Roused them from sleep, and next they saw the
 plain 28

Made grey and ugly with quick-coming thaw,
 And all the sky beset with fowl they saw,
 Who sniffed the wind and hastened from the sea
 Unto the floods now coming certainly.

For from their camp the Minyæ beheld
 How the swift river from the high ground
 swelled,

And still tormented by the wind and rain,
 Burst from the ice and covered all the plain
 With breadth of turbid waters, while around
 Their high-raised camp again they saw the ground
 Freed from the swathing snow; nor was it long
 Ere in the woods the birds began their song, 40
 For March was come and life to everything,
 Nor did the buds fear much the doubtful spring.

Now in few days the sun shone out again,
 The waters drew from off the flooded plain,
 And all was bright and soft as it might be,
 Though bank-high rolled the river to the sea,
 Made perilous with trees and heavy drift;
 Natheless on rollers Argo did they lift, 48
 And drew her toward the stream in spite of all
 The ills they saw, and chances that might fall;
 And there they launched her, being now most fain

Once more to try the green and shifting plain,
 And for the praise of other men they yearned
 And all the goods of life so dearly earned,
 Nor failed desire and longing love to come
 That spring-tide to those rovers far from home.

Therefore with joy they shouted, when once
 more

They felt great Argo move, and saw the shore
 Keep changing as they swept on toward the sea,
 With cheerful hearts still rowing steadily ; 60
 For now the ashen oars could they thrust forth
 Into the widened stream, that toward the north
 Ran swiftly, and thenceforward day by day
 Toiling, they made full many a league of way.
 Nor did they see great hills on either hand,
 When they had fairly passed the woody land
 Where they abode the winter ; neither heard
 The sound of falls to make their hearts afeared,
 But through great woods the gentle river ran,
 And plains where fed the herds unowned of
 man ; 70

Though sometimes in the night-time did they hear
 Men's voices calling out, far-off and near,
 But in some tongue not one among them knew,
 No, not the Queen : but Lynceus, passing through
 The woods with Idas, following up a bear,
 A sudden clamour of men's tongues did hear,
 And in a cleared space came upon a throng
 Of naked men and women, fair and strong,
 About a fire, just at point to eat,
 But at the flash of arms they to their feet 80
 Rose suddenly, and swiftly gat away,
 Nor durst the twain give chase to them that day,
 But coming to that fire, laid their hands
 On a brass cauldron, and three woollen bands,

That seemed like belts or fillets for their heads,
 Set thick with silver knots and amber beads.
 Now round the brazen cauldron, graven well,
 Were uncouth letters, that some tale might tell,
 If any them could read ; so when the fleece
 Was offered up unto the Gods of Greece, 90
 This thing in fair Messene Idas hung
 In the white fane where deeds of war are sung.

But through all this the wearied Minyæ
 Were drawing nigh unto the northern sea,
 And marshier grew the plain as on they went,
 And eastward the still-widening river bent,
 Until one day at eve, with chilling rain,
 The north-wind blew across the marshy plain
 Most cold and bitter, but to them as sweet
 As the rose-scented zephyr those do meet 100
 Who near the happy islands of the blest ;
 For as upon their eager brows it pressed,
 They sniffed withal the odour of the sea,
 And going on a mile, they seemed to be
 Within some eddy rippling languidly,
 And when the stream they tasted that went by
 Their shielded bulwark, better was the draught
 Than any wine o'er which a king has laughed,
 For still it savoured of the bitter sea. 109

So fell the night, and next day joyously
 They met the full flood, whose first toppling wave
 Against the sturdy prow of Argo drave,
 And with good heart, as 'midst the sweeping
 oars

It tossed and foamed, and swept the muddy
 shores,

They toiled, and felt no weariness that day.
 But though right well they gat them on their way

They failed ere dark the open sea to reach ;
 But in the night the murmur of the beach,
 Tormented by the changeful dashing seas,
 Came to their ears upon the fitful breeze. 120
 Then sore they longed for dawn, and when it
 broke

Again the waters foamed beneath their stroke,
 Till they had gained that river's utmost reach,
 Which from the sea by a low sandy beach
 Was guarded well, all but a little space,
 Through which now rushed in headlong, foam-
 ing race,

The huddled waters of the flowing tide.
 So there the Minyæ thought it good to bide
 And wait the ebb, dreading some hidden bank ;
 And while they waited to good hap they drank,
 And poured out wine unto the deity 131
 Who dwelt between the river and the sea,
 Forgetting not the great Earth-shaking One,
 Nor Her by whose help thus far they had run
 Their happy course unto that river's mouth.
 And now the wind had changed, and from the
 south

Blew softly, and the hot sun shining forth,
 Made lovely land of that once bitter north,
 And filled their hearts with longing thoughts of
 love,
 And worship of the sea-born seed of Jove.

But as they waited thus, with hearts that
 burned 141

To try the sea, the tide grew high and turned,
 And seaward through the deepened channel ran
 In gentle ripple 'gainst the breakers wan.
 Then thither gat the joyous Minyæ,
 And shouting, drave out Argo to the sea,

But when the first green ridge swept up her
bow,
Then Jason cried : ' And who shall stop us now ?
And who shall drive us unto other end,
Than that we will ? Let whoso be our friend,
Whoso our foe, henceforth, until the earth
Forgets of changeful men the death and birth,
We shall not be forgotten anywhere, ¹⁵³
But our deeds told shall free sad folk from care.'

So spake he, and his love beholding him,
Trembled for joy and love in every limb,
And inwardly she saw an ivory throne,
And Jason sitting with her there alone,
High o'er wise men and warriors worshipping.
For they were young, nor yet had felt the sting
Of poisonous fear, nor thought of coming age
And bitter death, the turning of the page
By those who quite forget what they have read,
Taking no heed of living folk or dead. ¹⁶⁴

Now hoisting sail, and labouring with the oar,
They passed along the amber-bearing shore,
A low coast, backed by pine-woods : none the
less

Some days they needs must pass in idleness,
And lie-to, 'midst white rolling mist and blind,
Lest Argo on some shallow death should find ;
Yet holpen by the steersman's mighty sire,
Safely they sailed until the land rose higher,
And through a narrow strait at last they went,
Brushing the unknown coast, where, with bows
bent, ¹⁷⁴

They saw a skin-clad folk awaiting them,
Who stood to watch the well-built Argo stem
The rushing tide upon the shingly beach,

And thence, as knowing that they could not reach
 The heroes with their arrows, shook their spears,
 And shouted unknown threats to careless ears.

But when against the midst of them they came,
 Forth strode a huge man, with red hair like
 flame, 182

And his huge bow against them strongly drew,
 Wherefrom a swift shaft straight to Argo flew,
 And whistling over Jason's head, stuck fast
 Over the barb-points in the gleaming mast.
 Then all men praised that archer; but the man
 Who in Arcadian woods all beasts outran,
 Straight drew his bow unto the arrow-head,
 And no man doubted that wild king was dead :
 Natheless, unmoved they saw the archer stand,
 And toward the Arcadian arrow stretch his hand,
 That midmost of his skin-clad body smote,
 But bounded back as from an iron coat.
 Then loud his people shouted, and all drew
 Their feeble bows, but short their arrows flew,
 And through the straits the wondering Minyæ
 Passed out unscathed into the open sea, 198
 While still of wizardry and charms they spoke.

But Jason from the mast the arrow broke,
 That erewhile had so scanty missed his life,
 And found it scored as by a sharp-edged knife,
 From barb to notch, with what seemed written
 words,

In tongue unknown to aught but beasts and birds
 So when Medea saw it, straight she said :

‘ Fair love, now praise some God thou art not
 dead,

For from the Cimbrian folk this arrow came,
 And its sharp barbs within a wizard's flame
 Were forged with peril, and the shaft of it

Was carved by one who in great fear did sit
 Within the haunted places of the wood, ²¹¹
 And tears are on its feathers, and red blood :
 Nor ask me now the name of her who taught
 This wisdom to me : but two arrows brought
 From this same folk to Æa have I seen,
 By one whose wounds will evermore be green
 While on the earth he dwells.' So spoke the maid,
 But Jason, wondering at the words she said,
 Gazed on her fair face, smiling lovingly, ²¹⁹
 Nor cared to think that he must one day die.

Now rose a south-east gale, and Argo lost
 All sight of land, and the vexed Minyæ, tost
 From sea to sea, began to feel a fear
 They yet might pass into some ocean drear,
 Beyond the circling sea that rings the world,
 And down a bottomless abyss be hurled,
 To fall for ever : then the winged twain,
 That erst had been the loathly harpies' bane,
 Came forth, and on the prow with wings spread
 wide, ²²⁹
 Half stood, half floated, while aloud they cried :—
 ' What dost thou, Father ? art thou sleeping
 then,
 And does it not suffice that trading men
 Float up and down, dead corpses on the sea,
 While all their wealth is lying wretchedly
 On Nereus' pavement ; but must we too drive
 Before this south wind, hopeless though alive,
 Until the farthest gulfs shall suck us down,
 And land our battered keel at Pluto's town ? '

So spake they ; but still blew the south the
 same

Until the starless night upon them came,
 But then a little did its fury lull, 241
 And when the rain-beat night was at its full,
 Fell to a light breeze, though still many a sea
 Swept Argo's deck, and still the Minyæ
 Had dread of some returning hideous blast.
 But when the doubtful night from them had
 past,

Barefoot upon the prow Medea stood,
 And burning in a censer hallowed wood,
 With muttered words she swung it, nor took heed
 Of how the wind was dealing with her weed.
 Nor with firm-planted feet one whit did reck
 Of washing of the brine about the deck, 252
 But swung her censer till a bright red flame
 From out the piercings of its cover came,
 Then round she turned and said : ' O Minyæ,
 Fear not to die within the northern sea,
 For on my head hither the north wind comes,
 And ye some day shall surely see your homes.
 But since upon us yet lies heavily
 My brother's death, forget not we must see
 My father's godlike sister, who one day 261
 With all due rites that blood shall wash away.

' And now, behold the sun shines through the
 clouds,
 And ye may hear across the well-strained shrouds
 The longed-for wind, therefore make no delay,
 For time it is that we were on our way,
 So let Erginus to the south-west steer ;—

' But sleep to me of all things now is dear,
 For with two mighty ones but for your sake
 Have I contended. He who still doth shake
 The firm-set earth, and She who draws the sea
 This way and that, the while in majesty 272

She sits, regarding little but her will ;—
 The fear of these my heavy heart doth fill.'

So said she, and with pale and languid face
 And half-shut eyes, unto the guarded place,
 Where was her golden bed, the maiden came.
 And in her dreams at first saw blood and flame
 O'er all the world, and nothing green or fair ;
 Then in a snowy land, with body bare, 280
 Went wandering long, be-mocked of uncouth
 things ;

Then stood before the judgement-seat of kings,
 Knowing no crime that she was charged withal,
 Until at last deep sleep on her did fall
 Like death itself, wherein the troublous past
 And fearsome future in one tomb are cast.

Meanwhile the Minyæ, joyful at her tale,
 Ran out the oars and hoisted up the sail,
 And toward the south with good hearts 'gan to go,
 While still they felt the favouring north wind
 blow, 290

And the third day again they saw the land,
 That in white cliffs rose up on the right hand,
 Coasting whereby, they came into a strait,
 Or so they deemed, for as the day grew late,
 Beneath a frosty light-blue sky and cold
 Another country could they now behold
 Dim o'er the glittering sea ; but in the night
 They by the moon past the high cliff and white
 Ceased not to sail, and lost the other shore
 When the day broke, nor saw it any more, 300
 As the first land they coasted, that changed oft
 , From those high cliffs to meadows green and soft,
 And then to other cliffs, some red, some grey,
 Till all the land at noon of the fourth day

281 wandering long,] wandering

They left astern, sailing where fate might lead,
 Of sun or stars scarce taking any heed,—
 Such courage in their hearts the White-armed set,
 Since, clad in gold, was Pelias living yet.

But to the Gods now did they sacrifice
 As seafarers may do, and things of price 310
 Gave to the tumbling billows of the sea.
 That for their lives still cried out hungrily,
 And though for many days they saw no shore,
 Yet fainted not their hearts as heretofore,
 For as along the pathless plain they went,
 The white-foot messenger the Goddess sent,
 Who, unseen, whispered in the helmsman's ear,
 And taught him how the goodly ship to steer ;
 And on a time it chanced as the day broke,
 And to their life the longing Minyæ woke, 320
 Across the risen sun the west wind blew
 A thin light rain, that He, just shining through,
 Showed to them all the many-coloured sign ;
 Then to the Goddess did they pour out wine,
 Right glad at heart ; but she the live-long day
 By Argo's prow flew o'er the shifting way
 Unseen of all, and turned them still to land ;
 And as they went the Thracian's cunning hand
 Stole o'er the harp-strings till Arion's steeds
 Gat them from 'twixt the tangled water-weeds,
 And lifted listening heads above the sea, 331
 And sea-birds, pensive with the harmony,
 About the mast, above the singer hung,
 With quivering wings, as from full heart he
 sung :—

‘ O death, that maketh life so sweet,
 O fear, with mirth before thy feet,
 What have ye yet in store for us,

The conquerors, the glorious ? ^

' Men say : " For fear that thou shouldst die
To-morrow, let to-day pass by 340
Flower-crowned and singing ; " yet have we
Passed our to-day upon the sea,
Or in a poisonous unknown land,
With fear and death on either hand,
And listless when the day was done
Have scarcely hoped to see the sun
Dawn on the morrow of the earth,
Nor in our hearts have thought of mirth.
And while the world lasts, scarce again
Shall any sons of men bear pain 350
Like we have borne, yet be alive.

' So surely not in vain we strive
Like other men for our reward ;
Sweet peace and deep, the chequered sward
Beneath the ancient mulberry-trees,
The smooth-paved gilded palaces,
Where the shy thin-clad damsels sweet
Make music with their gold-ringed feet.
The fountain court amidst of it,
Where the short-haired slave maidens sit, 360
While on the veined pavement lie
The honied things and spicery
Their arms have borne from out the town.

' The dancers on the thymy down
In summer twilight, when the earth
Is still of all things but their mirth,
And echoes borne upon the wind
Of others in like way entwined.

' The merchant towns' fair market-place,
Where over many a changing face 370
The pigeons of the temple flit,
And still the outland merchants sit

Like kings above their merchandise,
Lying to foolish men and wise.

‘ Ah ! if they heard that we were come
Into the bay, and bringing home
That which all men have talked about,
Some men with rage, and some with doubt,
Some with desire, and some with praise,
Then would the people throng the ways, 380
Nor heed the outland merchandise,
Nor any talk, from fools or wise,
But tales of our accomplished quest.

‘ What soul within the house shall rest
When we come home ? The wily king
Shall leave his throne to see the thing ;
No man shall keep the landward gate,
The hurried traveller shall wait
Until our bulwarks graze the quay,
Unslain the milk-white bull shall be 390
Beside the quivering altar-flame .
Scarce shall the maiden clasp for shame
Over her breast the raiment thin
The morn that Argo cometh in.

‘ Then cometh happy life again
That payeth well our toil and pain
In that sweet hour, when all our woe
But as a pensive tale we know,
Nor yet remember deadly fear ;
For surely now if death be near, 400
Unthought-of is it, and unseen
When sweet is, that hath bitter been.’

Thus sung the Thracian, and the rowing-folk
Sent Argo quivering with the well-timed stroke

Over the green hills, through great clouds of
 spray,

And as they went upon their happy way
 About the deck the longing men would stand
 With wistful eyes still gazing for the land ;
 Which yet they saw not, till the cool fresh night
 Had come upon them, with no lack of light, ⁴¹⁰
 For moon and stars shone brightly overhead,
 Nor through the night did Iris fail to lead
 The wave-tossed Argo o'er the glittering sea.

So as the moon set, did there seem to be
 Upon their larboard, banks of high-piled cloud,
 Which from their sight the last dark hour did
 shroud.

Then came the twilight, and those watchers fain
 Against the eastern light beheld again ⁴¹⁸
 The clouds unchanged, and as the daylight grew,
 Lynceus cried out : ' Some land we draw unto !
 Look forth, Erginus, on these mountains grey,
 If thou, perchance, hast seen them ere to-day '

Therewith all turned about, and some men ran
 To hear what words the God-begotten man
 Would say, who answered : ' Lynceus, and all ye,
 The man we left erewhile across the sea
 Might tell us this, the godlike Hercules ;
 Yet I myself think that the landless seas
 No more shall vex us now, but that we come
 Unto the gates that look into our home : ⁴³⁰
 So trim the sails, for thither will I steer,
 Seeking what lies beyond with little fear,
 Since surely now I see the Iberian land
 That 'gainst the shore of Africa doth stand,
 To break these mighty billows, ever pressed
 Each against each from out the landless west.'

So with glad hearts all men his bidding did,

And swiftly through the water Argo slid,
 Till as the sun rose were they near the strait,
 At whose mouth but a little did they wait 440
 Till they had eaten, pouring honied wine
 Unto the Gods, then bidding no new sign,
 They cried aloud, and running out the oars,
 They swept great Argo midmost 'twixt the
 shores

Of either land, and as her gilded prow
 Cleft the new waters, clean forgotten now
 Grew all the wasteful washing of the main,
 And clean forgotten the dull hopeless pain,
 In the great swirling river left so long,
 And in all hearts the memory was strong
 Of the bright Grecian headlands and the bay
 They left astern upon a glorious day. 452

BOOK XIII

Medea sees Circe, and has good counsel from her.

BUT as along the shore they sailed next day,
 Full many a headland on their lucky way
 Erginus knew, but said no towns there were
 Within that land, but that from year to year
 Well-nigh untilled the earth her produce gave,
 And many a herd the houseless people drave,
 And using neither roof nor sheltering wall,
 Dwelt but in tents, and had no want at all.

With that he bade them trim the bellying sail,
 For from the land now blew a gentle gale,
 Spice-laden, warm, that made their full hearts
 yearn 11

For unseen things, but soon they left astern

That fruitful place, the lion-haunted land,
Nor saw but tumbling seas on either hand

Three days they sailed, and passed on the
third day

A rock-bound coast upon their left that lay,
But on the morrow eve made land again,
Stretched right ahead across the watery plain,
Whereto ere nightfall did they draw anear,
And so lay-to till dawn with little fear ; 20
For from the shore a light, soft land-wind blew.

But as the dead night round about them drew,
The ceaseless roar of savage beasts they heard,
Mingled with sounds like cries of men afeared,
And blare of horns, and clank of heavy chains,
And noise of bells, such as in moonlit lanes
Rings from the grey team on the market-night.

And with these noises did they see a light,
That seemed to light some crown of palaces,
Shining from out a grove of thickset trees. 30
Then did the Minyæ doubt if they were come
Unto some great king's well-adorned home,
Or if some temple of a God were there,
Or if, indeed, the spirits of the air
Haunted that place : so slowly passed away
The sleepless night. and at the dawn of day
Their longing eyes beheld a lovely land,
Green meadows rising o'er a yellow strand,
Well-set with fair fruit-bearing trees, and groves
Of thick-leaved elms, all populous of doves,
And watered by a wandering clear green stream ;
And through the trees they saw a palace gleam
Of polished marble, fair beyond man's thought.

There as they lay, the sweetest scents were
brought

44

By sighing winds across the bitter sea,
 And languid music breathed melodiously.
 Steeping their souls in such unmixed delight,
 Their hearts were melted, and all dim of sight
 They grew, and scarce their hands could grip the
 oar, 49

And as they slowly neared the happy shore,
 The young men well-nigh wept, and e'en the wise
 Thought they had reached the gate of Paradise.

But 'midst them all Medea thoughtfully
 Gazed landward o'er the ripple of the sea,
 And said no word, till from her precious things
 She drew a casket full of chains and rings,
 And took therefrom a chaplet brown and sere,
 And set it on her head · and now being near
 The yellow strand, high on the poop she stood,
 And said : ' O heroes, what has chilled your
 blood, 60

That in such wise ye gaze upon this land
 With tearful eye, and nerveless, languid hand,
 And heaving breast, and measureless desire ?
 Be wise, for here the never-dying fire,
 The God-begotten wonder, Circe, lights,
 The wise of women, framer of delights
 That being of man once felt, he ne'er shall cease
 To long for vainly, as the years increase 63
 On his dulled soul, shut in some bestial form.

' And good it had been that some bitter storm
 Were tossing Argo's planks from sea to sea,
 Than ye had reached this fair land, but for me,
 Who amid tears and prayers, and nameless pain,
 Some little wisdom have made shift to gain :
 Look forth upon the green shore, and behold
 Those many beasts, all collared with fine gold,

53 But 'midst them stood Medea, and thoughtfully

Lions and pards, and small-eyed restless bears,
 And tusked boars, who from uneasy lairs
 Are just come forth ; nor is there 'mongst them
 one 79

But once walked upright underneath the sun,
 And had the name of man . such shall ye be,
 If from the ship ye wander heedlessly,
 But safely I my kinswoman may meet,
 And learn from her the bitter and the sweet
 That waits us ere ye come to Greece again,
 And see the wind-swept green Thessalian plain.

'Meanwhile, let nothing tempt you to the land,
 Nor unto anything stretch forth the hand
 That comes from shore, for all ye may see there
 Are but lost men and their undoers fair.' 90

But with that word they furrowed the wet sand,
 And straight they ran the gangway out to land,
 O'er which, with girded raiment, passed the
 queen ;

But now another marvel was there seen,
 For to the shore, from many a glade and lawn,
 The golden-collared sad-eyed beasts were drawn
 In close-set ranks above the sea-beat shore.
 And open-mouthed, with varying moan and roar,
 White-foot Medea did they seem to threat ;
 Whereat the Minyæ on their bow-strings set
 The notches of their arrows, but the maid 101
 Turned round about, with calm face unafraid,
 And said : ' O Minyæ, lay your weapons down,
 Nor fear for me ; behold this chaplet brown,
 Whose withered leaves rest lightly on my head,
 This is the herb that Gods and mortals dread,
 The Pontic Moly, the unchanging charm.'

.Then up the beach she passed, and her white
 arm

This way and that the leopards thrust aside,
And 'mid the grisly swine her limbs did glide,
And on a lion's mane her hand she laid ;
But still with moans they thronged about the
maid.

As she passed onward to the palace white,
Until the elm-groves hid her from the sight.

Then they with fearful hearts did sacrifice
Unto the Gods in their seafaring wise,
But of the lovely land were they so fain
That their return they scarcely counted gain,
Unto the green plain dotted o'er with folds
And that fair bay that Pelion beholds. 120

Meanwhile Medea through the thick-leaved
grove

Passed underneath the moaning of the dove,
Not left by those strange beasts ; until at last
Her feet from off the sparse long grasses passed
Unto a sunny space of daisied sward,
From which a strange-wrought silver grate did
guard

A lovely pleasure, set with flowers, foursquare,
On three sides ending in a cloister fair
That hid the fair feet of a marble house,
Carved thick with flowers and stories amorous.
And midmost of the slender garden trees 131

A gilded shrine stood, set with images,
Wherefrom the never-dying fire rose up
Into the sky, and a great jewelled cup
Ran over ever from a runlet red
Of fragrant wine, that 'mid the flowers shed
Strange scent that grapes yield not to any man,
While round about the shrine four streamlets ran
From golden founts to freshen that green place.

So there Medea stayed a little space, 140
 Gazing in wonder through the silver rail
 That fenced that garden from the wooded vale ;
 For damsels wandered there in languid wise
 As though they wearied of that Paradise,
 Their jewelled raiment dragging from its stalk
 The harmless daisy in their listless walk.
 But though from rosy heel to golden head
 Most fair they were and wrought with white and
 red,

Like to the casket-bearer who beguiled 149
 The hapless one, and though their lips still smiled,
 Yet to the Colchian, heavy-eyed they seemed,
 And each at other gazed as though she dreamed ;
 Not noting aught of all the glorious show
 She joined herself, nor seeming more to know
 What words she spoke nor what her fellows sung,
 Nor feeling arms that haply round her clung.

For here and there the Colchian maid could see
 Some browed seafarer kissing eagerly
 White feet or half-bared bosom, and could hear
 A rough voice stammering 'twixt love and fear
 Amid the dreamy murmur of the place, 161
 As on his knees, with eager upturned face,
 Some man would pour forth many a fruitless
 word,

That did but sound like song of a wild bird
 Unto his love ; while she for all reply,
 Still gazing on his flushed face wearily,
 Would undo clasp and belt, and show to him
 Undreamed-of loveliness of side or limb.

And in such guise of half-stripped jewelled
 weed, 169
 The men entrapped, Medea saw them lead
 Into the dark cool cloister, whence again

They came not forth, but four-foot, rough of
mane,

Uncouth with spots and dangerous of claw.

But when the sad-eyed beasts about her saw
These draw towards them and beheld the gate
Open and shut, and fellows to that state
New come, they whined, and brushing round her
feet

Prayed for return unto that garden sweet,
Their own undoing once, that yet shall be
Death unto many a toiler of the sea, 180
Because all these outside the silver grate
Were men indeed though inarticulate,
And, spite of seeming, in none otherwise,
Did longing torture them, than when in guise
Of men they stood before that garden green,
And first their eyes the baneful place had seen.

But now the queen grew wrath, for in her way,
Before the gate a yellow lion lay,
A tiger-cat her raiment brushed aside,
And o'er her feet she felt a serpent glide, 190
The swine screamed loud about her, and a pard
Her shining shoulder of her raiment bared
With light swift clutch; then she from off her
head

Took the sere moly wreath, and therewith said:—
'What do ye, wretches, know ye not this sign,
That whoso wears is as a thing divine?
Get from this place, for never more can ye
Become partakers of the majesty
That from man's soul looks through his eager
eyes.

Go—wail that ever ye were made so wise 200
As men are made; who chase through smooth
and rough

Their own undoing, nor can have enough
Of bitter trouble and entangling woe.'

Then slowly from her did those monsters go,
In varied voices mourning for their lot
And that sweet poison ne'er to be forgot.

But straight with serious face the Colchian maid
Her slender fingers on the latchet laid
That held the silver gate, and entered in ;
Nor did those weary images of sin 210
Take any heed of her as she passed by,
But, if they met her eyes, stared listlessly,
Like those who walk in sleep, and as they dream
Turn empty faces to the lightning's gleam,
And murmur softly while the thunder rolls.

Swiftly she passed those bodies void of souls,
And through the darkling corridor she passed,
And reached a huge adorned hall at last,
Where sat alone the deathless sorceress,
Upon whose knees an open book did press,
Wherein strange things the Gods knew not, she
read ; 221

A golden vine-bough wreathed her golden head,
And her fair body a thin robe did touch
With silken folds, but hid it not so much
As the cool ripple hides Diana's feet,
When through the brook the roe-deer, slim and
fleet,

She follows at the dawning of the day.

Smiling, she put the wondrous book away
As the light footsteps fell upon her ear,
She raised her head, and when the queen drew
near, 230

She said : ' O wanderer' from dark sea to sea,
I greet thee well, and dear thou art to me ;

231 from dark sea] from sea

Though verily if I could wish for aught,
I could have wished thou hadst been hither
brought

Ere that had happed to thee that haps to all,
Into the troublous sea of love to fall,
Then like unto the gods shouldst thou have been,
Nor ever died, but sitting here have seen
The fashion of the foolish world go by, 239
And drunk the cup of power and majesty.

‘ But now it may not be, and thou must come
With him thou boughtedst, to a troublous home ;
But since indeed the fates will have it so,
Take heed thou dost the things I bid thee do.
And, first, since thou wouldst have me purify
Your hands of his blood that thou sawest die
’Twixt yellow Phasis and the green-ridged sea,
Behold, this is not possible to me,
Nor ever must another altar stand
In this green nook of the Italian land, 250
To aught but me, no, not unto my Sire ;
But unto him shall ye light ruddy fire,
When, drawing nigh to your desired home,
Unto the headland of Malea ye come ;
And then, indeed, I bid you not to spare
Spices and golden things and raiment fair,
But to the country folk give things of price,
And from them take wherewith to sacrifice,
A hundred milkwhite bulls, a hundred kine,
And many a jar of unmixed honied wine, 260
And, crowned with olive, round the altars sing
Unto the God who gladdens everything,
Thy father’s father, the all-seeing Sun.
And then the deed thy Jason’s spear has done
Mayst thou forget, it shall not visit thee.
Moreover, sailing hence across the sea,

A waste of yellow sand shall ye pass by
 'Neath the Trinacrian cliffs, whereon shall lie
 Fair women, fairer than thine eyes have seen.
 And if thou still wouldst be a Grecian queen,
 When to that deadly place ye draw anear,
 And sweetest music ye begin to hear, 272
 Bid your bold love steer Argo from the land,
 While Thracian Orpheus takes his harp in hand,
 And sings thereto some God-delighting strain.
 And surely else shall all your toil be vain,
 For deadlier than my gardens are those sands ;
 And when the mariner's toil-hardened hands
 Reach out unto those bodies fair and white,
 They clasp but death instead of their delight.

' But, doing as I bid, Malea reach, 281
 And after, nigh Iolchos Argo beach,
 Yet at the city haste ye not to land,
 For still the sceptre presses Pelias' hand,
 And Æson is at rest for evermore ;
 Bid then thy folk lurk by some wooded shore,
 And to the white-walled city straightly wend
 Thyself alone, and safely there make end
 Of the King's life : nor need I teach thee how,
 For deep unfailing wiles thy soul doth know.

' What more ? what more ? I see thy grey
 eyes ask, 291
 What course, what ending to the tangled task
 The Gods have set before me, ere I die ?
 O child, I know all things, indeed, but why
 Shouldst thou know all, nor yet be wise therefore ?
 Me knowledge grieves not, thee should it grieve
 sore ;
 Nor knowing, shouldst thou cease to hope or fear.
 What ! do men think of death ere it draws near ?
 Not so, else surely would they stint their strife,

For lengthening out their little span of life,
 But where each found himself there should he sit,
 Not moving hand or foot for thought of it.
 Wherefore the Gods, wishing the earth to teem
 With living wills like theirs, nor as a dream
 To hold but beauty and the lives of beasts,
 That they may have fair stories for their feasts,
 Have given them forgetfulness of death,
 Longings and hopes, and joy in drawing breath,
 And they live happy, knowing nought at all,
 Nor what death is, where that shall chance to fall.
 For while he lives, few minutes certainly 311
 Does any man believe that he shall die.

Ah, what? thou hang'st thine head, and on
 thy feet

Down rain the tears from thy grey eyes and
 sweet;

Weep not, nor pity thine own life too much :
 Not painless shall it be, indeed, or such
 As the Gods live in their unchanged abode,
 And yet not joyless ; no unmeasured load
 Of sorrows shall thy dull soul learn to bear,
 With nought to keep thee back from death but
 fear, 320
 Of what thou know'st not, knowing nought but
 pain.

'But thoughfull oft thou shalt lift hands in vain,
 Crying to what thou know'st not in thy need,
 And blind with agony, yet oft, indeed,
 Shalt thou go nigh to think thyself divine.
 For love of what thou deemest to be thine,
 For joy of what thou dreamest cannot die.

'Live then thy life, nor ask for misery, 328
 Most certain if thou knewest what must be.

And then, at least, this shall not hap to thee,
 To be like those who people my sad groves,
 Beneath the moaning of the grey-winged doves.
 And midst all pain and joy, and wrong and
 right,
 Thy name to all shall be a dear delight
 While the world lasts, if this avail thee aught.

‘Farewell, O child, whose feet alone have
 brought 336

An earthly damsel to my house of gold,
 For surely those thou didst erewhile behold
 These hands have made, and can unmake again,
 Nor know they aught of love, or fear, or pain.
 Go, loiter not, this place befits thee nought.
 Thou knowest many things full dearly bought,
 And well I love thee, being so wise and fair,
 But what is knowledge in this deadly air,
 That floats about thee, poisoning hearts of man.
 Behold I see thy cheeks, that erst were wan,
 Flaming with new desire, and in thine eyes
 Shine out new thoughts that from thine heart
 arise ; 348

Gird up thy raiment, nor run slower now
 Than from the amorous bearer of the bow
 Once Daphne ran ; nor yet forget the word
 That thou from deadly lips this day hast heard.’

So said she, and thereat the Colchian maid
 Turned from her fair face shuddering and afraid,
 With beating heart, and flushed face like the
 rose

That in the garden of Damascus grows,
 And catching up her raiment, hurried through
 The mighty hall, where thick the pillars blue
 Stood like a dream to hold the roof aloft ;

But as she left it, musky odours soft 360
 Were cast about her by the dallying breeze,
 That through the heavy-fruited garden-trees
 Blew o'er those golden heads and bodies white,
 And limbs well made for manifold delight,
 From 'twixt whose fingers and the strings, did
 flow

Sweet music such as Helicon might know.

But dizzied, hurrying through the place she
 past,

Nor any look upon their beauty cast,
 Nor any thought unto the music gave,
 But set herself her own vext soul to save 370
 From that dread place ; beginning now to run
 Like to a damsel of the lightfoot One,
 Who oft from twilight unto twilight goes
 Through still dark woods, where never rough
 wind blows.

So, the grove passed, she made good speed to
 reach

The edges of the sea, the wind-swept beach ;
 But as she ran, afar the heroes saw
 Her raiment fluttering, and made haste to draw
 Their two-edged swords, and their strong bows
 to string,
 Doubting that she was chased of some dread
 thing ; 380

And Jason leapt ashore, and toward her ran,
 And with him went the arrow-loving man,
 The wise Arcadian, and the Minyæ
 Got ready shielded Argo for the sea.

But ere these met her, with uplifted hand,
 She cried : ' Turn back, nor deeper in this land
 Thrust ye your souls ; nought chases me but fear,

And all is well if on the sea we were ; 388
 Yea, if we once were free from fear and spell,
 Then, truly, better were all things than well.'

Thereat they stayed, but onward still she ran
 Until she reached them, and the godlike man
 Took by the arm, and hurrying him along,
 Stayed not until their feet were set among
 The last faint ripples of the gentle sea,
 Wherefrom they boarded Argo speedily,
 And Jason bid all men unto the oar.

With that they left the fair death-bearing
 shore,
 Not gladlier than some fair young man may
 leave

His love, upon the odorous summer eve, 400
 When she turns sighing to her father's house,
 And leaves him there alone and amorous,
 Heartsick with all that shame has let him see,
 Grieved that no bolder he has dared to be.

BOOK XIV

The Sirens—The Garden of the Hesperides—The heroes
 do sacrifice at Malea.

Now o'er the open sea they took their way,
 For three days, and at dawning of the day,
 Upon the fourth, saw the Trinacrian shore,
 And there-along they coasted two days more.
 Then first Medea warned them to take heed,
 Lest they should end all memory of their deed
 Where dwell the Sirens on the yellow sand,
 And folk should think some tangled poisonous
 land

Had buried them, or some tumultuous sea
O'er their white bones was tossing angrily ;
Or that some muddy river, far from Greece,
Drove seaward o'er the ringlets of the fleece.

But when the Minyæ hearkened to this word,
With many a thought their wearied hearts were
stirred,

And longing for the near-gained Grecian land,
Where in a little while their feet should stand ;
Yet none the less like to a happy dream,
Now, when they neared it, did their own home
seem.

And like a dream the glory of their quest,
And therewithal some thought of present rest
Stole over them, and well-nigh made them sigh
To hear the sighing restless wind go by.

But now, nigh even on the second day,
As o'er the gentle waves they took their way,
The orange-scented land-breeze seemed to bear
Some other sounds unto the listening ear
Than all day long they had been hearkening—
The land-born signs of many a well-known thing.
Thereat Medea trembled, for she knew
That nigh the dreadful sands at last they drew,
For certainly the Sirens' song she heard, ³¹
Though yet her ear could shape it to no word,
And by their faces could the queen behold
How sweet it was, although no tale it told,
To those worn toilers o'er the bitter sea.

Now, as they sped along, they presently,
Rounding a headland, reached a little bay,
Walled from the sea by splintered cliffs and grey,
Capped by the thymy hills' green wind-beat head,
Where 'mid the whin the burrowing rabbits
fed.

And by their faces could the queen behold
How sweet it was, although no tale it told,
To those worn toilers o'er the bitter sea.

Now, as they sped along, they presently,
Rounding a headland, reached a little bay,
Walled from the sea by splintered cliffs and grey,
Capped by the thymy hills' green wind-beat head,
Where 'mid the whin the burrowing rabbits
fed.

And 'neath the cliff they saw a belt of sand,
 'Twixt Nereus' pasture and the highscarp'd land,
 Whereon, yet far off, could their eyes behold
 White bodies moving, crowned and girt with gold,
 Wherefrom it seemed that lovely music welled.

So when all this the grey-eyed queen beheld,
 She said : ' O Jason, I have made thee wise
 In this and other things ; turn then thine eyes
 Seaward, and note the ripple of the sea,
 Where there is hope as well as fear for thee.
 Nor look upon the death that lurketh there
 'Neath the grey cliff, though sweet it seems and
 fair ;

52

For thou art young upon this day to die.
 Take then the helm, and gazing steadily
 Upon the road to Greece, make strong thine hand
 And steer us toward the lion-haunted land :
 And thou, O Thracian ! if thou e'er hast moved
 Men's hearts with stories of the Gods who loved,
 And men who suffered, move them on this day,
 Taking the deadly love of death away, 60
 That even now is stealing over them,
 While still they gaze upon the ocean's hem,
 Where their undoing is if they but knew.'

But while she spake, still nigher Argo drew
 Unto the yellow edges of the shore,
 And little help she had of ashen oar,
 For as her shielded side rolled through the sea,
 Silent with glittering eyes the Minyæ
 Gazed o'er the surge, for they were nigh enow
 To see the gusty wind of evening blow 70
 Long locks of hair across those bodies white,
 With golden spray hiding some dear delight ;

41 belt] waste

Yea, nigh enow to see their red lips smile,
 Wherefrom all song had ceased now for a while,
 As though they deemed the prey was in the net,
 And they no more had need a bait to set,
 But their own bodies, fair beyond man's thought,
 Under the grey cliff, hidden not of aught
 But of such mist of tears as in the eyes
 Of those seafaring men might chance to rise.

A moment Jason gazed, then through the waist
 Ran swiftly, and with trembling hands made
 haste 82

To trim the sail, then to the tiller ran,
 And thrust aside the skilled Milesian man,
 Who with half-open mouth, and dreamy eyes,
 Stood steering Argo to that land of lies ;
 But as he staggered forward, Jason's hand
 Hard on the tiller steered away from land,
 And as her head a little now fell off
 Unto the wide sea, did he shout this scoff 90
 To Thracian Orpheus : ' Minstrel, shall we die,
 Because thou hast forgotten utterly
 What things she taught thee that men call
 divine,

Or will thy measures but lead folk to wine,
 And scented beds, and not to noble deeds ?
 Or will they fail as fail the shepherd's reeds
 Before the trumpet, when these sea-witches
 Pipe shrilly to the washing of the seas ?
 I am a man, and these but beasts, but thou
 Giving these souls, that all were men ere now
 Shall be a very God and not a man ! ' 101

So spake he ; but his fingers Orpheus ran
 Over the strings, and sighing turned away
 From that fair ending of the sunny bay ;
 But as his well-skilled hands were preluding

What his heart swelled with, they began to sing
 With pleading voices from the yellow sands,
 Clustered together, with appealing hands
 Reached out to Argo as she turned away,
 While o'er their white limbs flew the flakes of
 spray, 110

Since they spared not to set white feet among
 The cold waves heedless of their honied song.

Sweetly they sung, and still the answer came
 Piercing and clear from him, as bursts the flame
 From out the furnace in the moonless night ;
 Yet, as their words are no more known aright
 Through lapse of many ages, and no man
 Can any more across the waters wan
 Behold those singing women of the sea,
 Once more I pray you all to pardon me, 120
 If with my feeble voice and harsh I sing
 From what dim memories may chance to cling
 About men's hearts, of lovely things once sung
 Beside the sea, while yet the world was young.

THE SIRENS.

O happy seafarers are ye,
 And surely all your ills are past,
 And toil upon the land and sea,
 Since ye are brought to us at last.
 To you the fashion of the world, 129
 Wide lands laid waste, fair cities burned,
 And plagues, and kings from kingdoms hurled,
 Are nought, since hither ye have turned.
 For as upon this beach we stand,
 And o'er our heads the sea-fowl flit,
 Our eyes behold a glorious land,
 And soon shall be ye kings of it.

ORPHEUS.

A little more, a little more,
 O carriers of the Golden Fleece,
 A little labour with the oar,
 Before we reach the land of Greece. 140
 E'en now perchance faint rumours reach
 Men's ears of this our victory,
 And draw them down unto the beach
 To gaze across the empty sea.
 But since the longed-for day is nigh,
 And scarce a God could stay us now,
 Why do ye hang your heads and sigh,
 Hindering for nought our eager prow ?

THE SIRENS.

Ah, had ye chanced to reach the home
 Your fond desires were set upon, 150
 Into what troubles had ye come,
 What barren victory had ye won.
 But now, but now, when ye have lain
 Asleep with us a little while
 Beneath the washing of the main,
 How calm shall be your waking smile !
 For ye shall smile to think of life
 That knows no troublous change or fear,
 No unavailing bitter strife,
 That ere its time brings trouble near. 160

ORPHEUS.

Is there some murmur in your ears,
 That all that we have done is nought,
 And nothing ends our cares and fears,
 Till the last fear on us is brought ?

148 And still go slower and more slow ?

THE SIRENS.

Alas ! and will ye stop your ears,
 . In vain desire to do aught,
 And wish to live 'mid cares and fears,
 Until the last fear makes you nought ?

ORPHEUS.

Is not the May-time now on earth,
 When close against the city wall 170
 The folk are singing in their mirth,
 While on their heads the May-flowers fall ?

THE SIRENS.

Yes, 'May is come, and its sweet breath
 Shall well-nigh make you weep to-day,
 And pensive with swift-coming death,
 Shall ye be satiate of the May.

ORPHEUS

Shall not July bring fresh delight,
 As underneath green trees ye sit,
 And o'er some damsel's body white
 The noontide shadows change and flit ?

THE SIRENS.

No new delight July shall bring, 181
 But ancient fear and fresh desire,
 And, spite of every lovely thing,
 Of July surely shall ye tire.

ORPHEUS.

And now, when August comes on thee,
 And 'mid the golden sea of corn
 The merry reapers thou mayst see,
 Wilt thou still think the earth forlorn ?

THE SIRENS.

Set flowers on thy short-lived head,
 And in thine heart forgetfulness 190
 Of man's hard toil, and scanty bread,
 And weary of those days no less.

ORPHEUS.

Or wilt thou climb the sunny hill,
 In the October afternoon,
 To watch the purple earth's blood fill
 The grey vat to the maiden's tune ?

THE SIRENS.

When thou beginnest to grow old,
 Bring back remembrance of thy bliss
 With that the shining cup doth hold,
 And weary helplessly of this. 200

ORPHEUS.

Or pleasureless shall we pass by
 The long cold night and leaden day,
 That song, and tale, and minstrelsy
 Shall make as merry as the May ?

THE SIRENS.

List then, to-night, to some old tale
 Until the tears o'erflow thine eyes ;
 But what shall all these things avail,
 When sad to-morrow comes and dies ?

ORPHEUS.

And when the world is born again,
 And with some fair love, side by side, 210
 Thou wanderest 'twixt the sun and rain,
 In that fresh love-begetting tide ;

Then, when the world is born again,
 And the sweet year before thee lies,
 Shall thy heart think of coming pain,
 Or vex itself with memories ?

THE SIRENS.

Ah ! then the world is born again
 With burning love unsatisfied,
 And new desires fond and vain,
 And weary days from tide to tide. 220

Ah ! when the world is born again,
 A little day is soon gone by,
 When thou, unmoved by sun or rain,
 Within a cold straight house shall lie.

Therewith they ceased awhile, as languidly
 The head of Argo fell off toward the sea,
 And through the water she began to go,
 For from the land a fitful wind did blow,
 That, dallying with the many-coloured sail,
 Would sometimes swell it out and sometimes
 fail, 230
 As nigh the east side of the bay they drew ;
 Then o'er the waves again the music flew.

THE SIRENS.

Think not of pleasure, short and vain,
 Wherewith, 'mid days of toil and pain,
 With sick and sinking hearts ye strive
 To cheat yourselves that ye may live
 With cold death ever close at hand,
 Think rather of a peaceful land,
 The changeless land where ye may be .
 Roofed over by the changeful sea. 240

ORPHEUS.

And is the fair town nothing then,
 The coming of the wandering men
 With that long talked of thing and strange,
 And news of how the kingdoms change,
 The pointed hands, and wondering
 At doers of a desperate thing ?
 Push on, for surely this shall be
 Across a narrow strip of sea.

THE SIRENS.

Alas ! poor souls and timorous,
 Will ye draw nigh to gaze at us 250
 And see if we are fair indeed.
 For such as we shall be your meed,
 There, where our hearts would have you go.
 And where can the earth-dwellers show
 In any land such loveliness
 As that wherewith your eyes we bless,
 O wanderers of the Minyæ.
 Worn toilers over land and sea ?

ORPHEUS.

Fair as the lightning thwart the sky,
 As sun-dyed snow upon the high 260
 Untrodden heaps of threatening stone
 The eagle looks upon alone,
 O fair as the doomed victim's wreath,
 O fair as deadly sleep and death,
 What will ye with them, earthly men.
 To mate your three-score years and ten ?
 Toil rather, suffer and be free,
 Betwixt the green earth and the sea.

THE SIRENS.

If ye be bold with us to go,
 Things such as happy dreams may show 270
 Shall your once heavy eyes behold
 About our palaces of gold ;
 Where waters 'neath the waters run,
 And from o'erhead a harmless sun
 Gleams through the woods of chrysolite.
 There gardens fairer to the sight
 Than those of the Phæacian king
 Shall ye behold ; and, wondering,
 Gaze on the sea-born fruit and flowers,
 And thornless and unchanging bowers, 280
 Whereof the May-time knoweth nought.

So to the pillared house being brought,
 Poor souls, ye shall not be alone,
 For o'er the floors of pale blue stone
 All day such feet as ours shall pass,
 And, 'twixt the glimmering walls of glass,
 Such bodies garlanded with gold,
 So faint, so fair, shall ye behold,
 And clean forget the treachery
 Of changing earth and tumbling sea. 290

ORPHEUS.

O the sweet valley of deep grass,
 Where through the summer stream doth pass,
 In chain of shallow, and still pool,
 From misty morn to evening cool ;
 Where the black ivy creeps and twines
 O'er the dark-armed, red-trunked pines,
 Whence clattering the pigeon flits,
 Or, brooding o'er her thin eggs, sits,
 And every hollow of the hills
 With echoing song the mavis fills. 300

There by the stream, all unafraid,
 Shall stand the happy shepherd maid,
 Alone in first of sunlit hours ;
 Behind her, on the dewy flowers,
 Her homespun woollen raiment lies,
 And her white limbs and sweet grey eyes
 Shine from the calm green pool and deep,
 While round about the swallows sweep,
 Not silent ; and would God that we,
 Like them, were landed from the sea. 310

THE SIRENS.

Shall we not rise with you at night,
 Up through the shimmering green twilight,
 That maketh there our changeless day,
 Then going through the moonlight grey,
 Shall we not sit upon these sands,
 To think upon the troublous lands
 Long left behind, where once ye were,
 When every day brought change and fear ?
 There, with white arms about you twined,
 And shuddering somewhat at the wind 320
 That ye rejoiced erewhile to meet,
 Be happy, while old stories sweet,
 Half understood, float round your ears,
 And fill your eyes with happy tears.
 Ah ! while we sing unto you there,
 As now we sing, with yellow hair
 Blown round about these pearly limbs,
 While underneath the grey sky swims
 The light shell-sailor of the waves,
 And to our song, from sea-filled caves 330
 Booms out an echoing harmony,
 Shall ye not love the peaceful sea ?

ORPHEUS.

Nigh the vine-covered hillocks green,
 In days agone, have I not seen
 The brown-clad maidens amorous,
 Below the long rose-trellised house,
 Dance to the querulous pipe and shrill,
 When the grey shadow of the hill
 Was lengthening at the end of day ?
 Not shadowy or pale were they,
 But limbed like those who 'twixt the trees, 340
 Follow the swift of Goddesses.
 Sunburnt they are somewhat, indeed,
 To where the rough brown woollen weed
 Is drawn across their bosoms sweet,
 Or cast from off their dancing feet ;
 But yet the stars, the moonlight grey,
 The water wan, the dawn of day,
 Can see their bodies fair and white
 As Hers, who once, for man's delight, 350
 Before the world grew hard and old,
 Came o'er the bitter sea and cold ;
 And surely those that met me there,
 Her handmaidens and subjects were ;
 And shame-faced, half-repressed desire
 Had lit their glorious eyes with fire,
 That maddens eager hearts of men.
 O would that I were with them when
 The risen moon is gathering light,
 And yellow from the homestead white 360
 The windows gleam ; but verily
 This waits us o'er a little sea.

THE SIRENS.

Come to the land where none grows old,
 And none is rash or over-bold,

Nor any noise there is or war,
 Or rumour from wild lands afar,
 Or plagues, or birth and death of kings ;
 No vain desire of unknown things
 Shall vex you there, no hope or fear
 Of that which never draweth near ; 370
 But in that lovely land and still
 Ye may remember what ye will,
 And what ye will, forget for aye.

So while the kingdoms pass away,
 Ye sea-beat hardened toilers erst,
 Unresting, for vain fame athirst,
 Shall be at peace for evermore,
 With hearts fulfilled of Godlike lore,
 And calm, unwavering Godlike love,
 No lapse of time can turn or move. 380
 There, ages after your fair fleece
 Is clean forgotten, yea, and Greece
 Is no more counted glorious,
 Alone with us, alone with us,
 Alone with us, dwell happily,
 Beneath our trembling roof of sea.

ORPHEUS.

Ah ! do ye weary of the strife
 And long to change this eager life
 For shadowy and dull hopelessness,
 Thinking indeed to gam no less 390
 Than far from this grey light to lie.
 And there to die and not to die,
 To be as if ye ne'er had been,
 Yet keep your memory fresh and green,

391 *This line was not in the first edition.*

392 And there] 'Than this,

To have no thought of good or ill,
 Yet feed your fill of pleasure still ?
 O idle dream ! Ah, verily
 If it shall happen unto me
 That I have thought of anything,
 When o'er my bones the sea-fowl sing, 400
 And I lie dead, how shall I pine
 For those fresh joys that once were mine,
 On this green fount of joy and mirth,
 The ever young and glorious earth ;
 Then, helpless, shall I call to mind
 Thoughts of the sweet flower-scented wind,
 The dew, the gentle rain at night,
 The wonder-working snow and white,
 The song of birds, the water's fall,
 The sun that maketh bliss of all ; 410
 Yea, this our toil and victory,
 The tyrannous and conquered sea.

THE SIRENS.

Ah, will ye go, and whither then
 Will ye go from us, soon to die,
 To fill your three-score years and ten,
 With many an unnamed misery ?
 And this the wretchedest of all,
 That when upon your lonely eyes
 The last faint heaviness shall fall
 Ye shall bethink you of our cries, 420
 Come back, nor grown old, seek in vain
 To hear us sing across the sea.
 Come back, come back, come back again,
 Come back, O fearful Minyæ !

396 Yet keep some thrilling pleasure still ?
 406 the sweet flower-scented] the flower-scented

ORPHEUS.

Ah, once again, ah, once again.

The black prow plunges through the sea,
Nor yet shall all your toil be vain,
Nor ye forgot, O Minyæ.

In such wise sang the Thracian, in such wise
Out gushed the Sirens' deadly melodies ; 430
But long before the mingled song was done,
Back to the oars the Minyæ, one by one,
Slunk silently ; though many an one sighed sore,
As his strong fingers met the wood once more ;
And from his breast the toilsome breathing came.

But as they laboured, some for very shame
Hung down their heads, and yet amongst them
some

Gazed at the place whence that sweet song had
come ; 438

But round the oars and Argo's shielded side
The sea grew white, and she began to glide
Swift through the waters of that deadly bay ;
But when a long wake now behind her lay,
And still the whistle of the wind increased,
Past shroud and mast, and all the song had
ceased,

Butes rose up, the fair Athenian man,
And with wild eyes betwixt the rowers ran
Unto the poop and leapt into the sea ;
Then all men rested on their oars, but he
Rose to the top, and towards the shore swam fast ;
While all eyes watched him, who had well-nigh
past 450

The place where sand and water 'gan to meet
In wreaths and ripples round the ivory feet,

When sun-burnt swimmer, snow-white glancing
limb,

And yellow sand unto their eyes grew dim,
Nor did they see their fellow any more.

But when they once again beheld the shore
The wind sung o'er the empty beach and bare,
And by the cliff uprose into the air
A delicate and glittering little cloud,
That seemed some many-coloured sun to shroud;
But as the rugged cliff it drew above 461
The wondering Minyæ beheld it move
Westward, toward Lilybæum and the sun.

Then once more was their seaward course
begun,
And soon those deadly sands were far astern,
Nor ever after could the heroes learn
If Butes lived or died ; but old tales tell
That while the tumbling waves he breasted well,
Venus beheld him, as unseen she drew
From sunny Cyprus to the headland blue 470
Of Lilybæum, where her temple is ;
She, with a mind his sun-burnt brows to kiss,
E'en as his feet were dropping nigh the beach,
And ere his hand the deadly hands could reach,
Stooped, as the merlin stoops upon the dove,
And snatched him thence to be awhile her love,
Betwixt the golden pillars of her shrine,
That those who pass the Ægades see shine
From high-raised Lilybæum o'er the sea.

But far away the sea-beat Minyæ 480
Cast forth the foam, as through the growing night
They laboured ever, having small delight
In life all empty of that promised bliss,

In love that scarce can give a dying kiss,
 In pleasure ending sweet songs with a wail,
 In fame that little can dead men avail,
 In vain toil struggling with the fateful stream,
 In hope, the promise of a morning dream.

Yet as night died, and the cold sea and grey
 Seemed running with them toward the dawn of
 day, 490

Needs must they once again forget their death,
 Needs must they, being alive and drawing breath,
 As men who of no other life can know
 In their own minds again immortal grow.

But toward the south a little now they bent,
 And for awhile o'er landless sea they went,
 But on the third day made another land
 At dawn of day, and thitherward did stand ;
 And since the wind blew lightly from the shore,
 Somewhat abeam, they feared not with the oar
 To push across the shallowing sea and green, 501
 That washed a land the fairest they had seen,
 Whose shell-strewn beach at highest of the tide
 'Twixt sea and flowery shore was nowise wide,
 And drawn a little backward from the sea
 There stood a marble wall wrought cunningly,
 Rosy and white, set thick with images,
 And over-topped with heavy-fruited trees,
 Which by the shore ran, as the bay did bend :
 And to their eyes had neither gap nor end ;
 Nor any gate : and looking over this, 511
 They saw a place not made for earthly bliss,
 Or eyes of dying men, for growing there
 The yellow apple and the painted pear,
 And well-filled golden cups of oranges
 Hung amid groves of pointed cypress trees ;
 On grassy slopes the twining vine-boughs grew,

And hoary olives 'twixt far mountains blue,
 And many-coloured flowers, like as a cloud ⁵¹⁹
 The rugged southern cliffs did softly shroud,
 And many a green-necked bird sung to his mate
 Within the slim-leaved, thorny pomegranate,
 That flung its unstrung rubies on the grass,
 And slowly o'er the place the wind did pass
 Heavy with many odours that it bore
 From thymy hills down to the sea-beat shore,
 Because no flower there is, that all the year,
 From spring to autumn, beareth otherwhere,
 But there it flourished; nor the fruit alone
 From 'twixt the green leaves and the boughs
 outshone, ⁵³⁰
 For there each tree was ever flowering.

Nor was there lacking many a living thing
 Changed of its nature, for the roe-deer there
 Walked fearless with the tiger, and the bear
 Rolled sleepily upon the fruit-strawn grass,
 Letting the coneys o'er his rough hide pass,
 With blinking eyes, that meant no treachery.
 Careless the partridge passed the red fox by;
 Untouched the serpent left the thrushes brown,
 And as a picture was the lion's frown. ⁵⁴⁰

But in the midst there was a grassy space,
 Raised somewhat o'er all the flowery place,
 On marble terrace-walls wrought like a dream;
 And round about it ran a clear blue stream,
 Bridged o'er with marble steps, and midmost there
 Grew a green tree, whose smooth grey boughs
 did bear

Such fruit as never man elsewhere had seen,

519 like as a] like a

521 sung to his mate] they saw alight

535 fruit-strawn] fruit-strown

547 had] has

For 'twixt the sunlight and the shadow green
 Shone out fair apples of red gleaming gold.
 Moreover round the tree, in many a fold, 550
 Lay coiled a dragon, glittering little less
 Than that which his eternal watchfulness
 Was set to guard ; nor yet was he alone,
 For from the daisied grass about him shone
 Gold raiment wrapping round two damsels fair,
 And one upon the steps combed out her hair
 And with shut eyes sung low as in a dream ;
 And one stood naked in the cold blue stream,
 While on the bank her golden raiment lay ;
 But on that noontide of the quivering day,
 She only, hearing the seafarers' shout, 561
 Her lovely golden head had turned about,
 And seen their white sail flapping o'er the wall,
 And as she turned had let her tresses fall,
 Which the thin water rippling round her knee
 Bore outward from her toward the restless sea.

Not long she stood, but looking seaward yet,
 From out the water made good haste to get,
 And catching up her raiment hastily,
 Ran up the marble stair, and 'gan to cry : 570
 ' Wake, O my sisters, wake, for now are come
 The thieves of Æa to our peaceful home.'

Then at her voice they gat them to their feet,
 And when her raiment all her body sweet
 Once more had hidden, joining hand to hand,
 About the sacred apples did they stand,
 While coiled the dragon closer to the tree,
 And raised his head above them threateningly.

Meanwhile, from Argo many a sea-beat face
 Gazed longingly upon that lovely place, 580
 And some their eager hands already laid

Upon the gangway. Then Medea said :—
 ' Get back unto the oars, O Minyæ,
 Nor loiter here, for what have such as we
 To do herein, where, 'mid undying trees,
 Undying watch the wise Hesperides,
 And where the while they watch, scarce can a
 God

Set foot upon the fruit-besprinkled sod
 That no snow ever covers ? therefore haste,
 Nor yet in wondering your fair lives waste ;
 For these are as the Gods, nor think of us, 591
 Nor to their eyes can aught be glorious
 That son of man can do ; would God that I
 Could see far off the misty headland lie,
 Where we the guilt of blood shall wash away,
 For I grow weary of the dashing spray,
 And ceaseless roll of interwoven seas,
 And fain were sitting 'neath the whispering trees
 In homely places, where the children play,
 Who change like me, grow old, and die some
 day.' 600

(She ceased, and little soothly did they grieve,
 For all its loveliness, that land to leave,
 For now some God had chilled their hardihead,
 And in their hearts had set a sacred dread,
 They knew not why ; but on their oars they
 hung,
 A little longer as the sisters sung.

' O ye, who to this place have strayed,
 That never for man's eyes was made,
 Depart in haste, as ye have come,
 And bear back to your sea-beat home 610
 This memory of the age of gold,
 And for your eyes, grown over-bold,

Your hearts shall pay in sorrowing,
For want of many a half-seen thing.

‘Lo, such as is this garden green,
In days past, all the world has been,
And what we know all people knew,
But this, that unto worse all grew.

‘But since the golden age is gone,
This little place is left alone, 620
Unchanged, unchanging, watched of us,
The daughters of wise Hesperus.

‘Surely the heavenly Messenger
Full oft is fain to enter here,
And yet without must he abide,
Nor longeth less the dark king’s bride
To set red lips unto that fruit
That erst made nought her mother’s suit.
Here would Diana rest awhile,
Forgetful of her woodland guile, 630
Among these beasts that fear her nought.
Nor is it less in Pallas’ thought,
Beneath our trees to ponder o’er
The wide, unfathomed sea of lore ;
And oft-kissed Cithæra, no less
Weary of love, full fain would press
These flowers with unsandalled feet.

‘But unto us our rest is sweet,
Neither shall any man or God
Or lovely Goddess touch the sod 640
Where-under old times buried lie,
Before the world knew misery.
Nor will we have a slave or king,
Nor yet will we learn anything
But that we know, that makes us glad ;
While oft the very Gods are sad

With knowing what the Fates shall do.
 'Neither from us shall wisdom go
 To fill the hungering hearts of men,
 Lest to them threescore years and ten 650
 Come but to seem a little day,
 Once given, taken soon away.
 Nay, rather let them find their life
 Bitter and sweet, fulfilled of strife,
 Restless with hope, vain with regret,
 Trembling with fear, most strangely set
 'Twixt memory and forgetfulness ;
 So more shall joy be, troubles less,
 And surely when all this is past,
 They shall not want their rest at last. 660
 'Let earth and heaven go their way,
 While still we watch from day to day,
 In this green place left all alone,
 A remnant of the days long gone.'

There in the wind they hung, as word by word
 The clear-voiced singers silently they heard ;
 But when the air was barren of their song,
 Anigh the shore they durst not linger long,
 So northward turned forewearied Argo's head,
 And dipping oars, from that fair country sped,
 Fulfilled of new desires and pensive thought,
 Which that day's life unto their hearts had
 brought. 672

Then hard they toiled upon the bitter sea,
 And in two days they did not fail to be
 In sight of land, a headland high and blue,
 Which straight Milesian Erginus knew
 To be the fateful place which now they sought,
 Stormy Malea, so thitherward they brought
 The groaning ship, and, casting anchor, lay

Beneath that headland's lee, within a bay,
Wherefrom the more part landed, and their feet
Once more the happy soil of Greece did meet.

Therewith they failed not to bring ashore
Rich robes of price and of fair arms good store,
And gold and silver, that they there might buy
What yet they lacked for their solemnity ;
Then, while upon the highest point of land
Some built an altar, Jason, with a band
Of all the chiefest of the Minyæ, 689
Turned inland from the murmur of the sea.

Not far they went ere by a little stream
Down in a valley they could see the gleam
Of brazen pillars and fair-gilded vanes,
And, dropping down by dank dark-wooded
lanes

From off the hill-side, reached a house at last
Where in and out men-slaves and women
passed,

And guests were streaming fast into the hall
Where now the oaken boards were laid for all.
With these the Minyæ went, and soon they were
Within a pillared hall both great and fair, 700
Where folk already sat beside the board,
And on the dais was an ancient lord.

But when these saw the fearless Minyæ
Glittering in arms, they sprang up hastily,
And each man turned about unto the wall
To seize his spear or staff : then through the hall
Jason cried out : ' Laconians, fear ye not,
Nor leave the flesh-meat while it yet is hot
For dread of us, for we are men as ye,
And I am Jason of the Minyæ, 710
And come from Æa to the land of Greece,
And in my ship bear back the Golden Fleece,

And a fair Colchian queen to fill my bed.
 And now we pray to share your wine and bread,
 And other things we need, and at our hands
 That ye will take fair things of many lands.'

'Sirs,' said the ancient lord, 'be welcome here,
 Come up and sit by me, and make such cheer
 As here ye can : glad am I that to me
 The first of Grecian men from off the sea 720
 Ye now are come.'

Therewith the great hall rang
 With joyful shouts, and as, with clash and clang
 Of well-wrought arms, up to the dais they went,
 All eyes upon the Minyæ were bent,
 Nor could they have enough of wondering
 At this or that sea-tossed victorious king.

So with the strangers there they held high
 feast,
 And afterwards the slaves drove many a beast
 Down to the shore, and carried back again
 Great store of precious things in pack and wain ;
 Wrought gold and silver, gems, full many a bale
 Of scarlet cloth, and fine silk, fit to veil 732
 The perfect limbs of dreaded Goddesses ;
 Spices fresh-gathered from the outland trees,
 And arms well-wrought, and precious scarce-
 known wine,
 And carven images well-nigh divine.

So when all folk with these were satisfied,
 Back went the Minyæ to the water-side,
 And with them that old lord, fain to behold
 Victorious Argo and the Fleece of Gold. 740
 And so aboard amid the oars he lay
 Throughout the night, and at the dawn of day
 Did all men land, nor spared that day to wear

723 Of well-wrought arms] Of brass and steel

The best of all they had of gold-wrought gear,
 And every one, being crowned with olive grey,
 Up to the headland did they take their way,
 Where now already stood the crowned priests
 About the altars by the gilt-horned beasts.
 There as the fair sun rose, did Jason break
 Over the altar the thin barley-cake, 750
 And cast the salt abroad, and there were slain
 The milk-white bulls, and there red wine did rain
 On to the fire from out the ancient jar,
 And high rose up the red flame, seen afar
 From many another headland of that shore,
 And through its fitful crackling and its roar,
 From time to time in pleading song and prayer,
 Swept by the wind about the summer air,
 Clear rung the voices of the Minyæ
 Unto the dashing of the conquered sea, 760
 That far below thrust on by tide and wind
 The crumbling bases of the headland mined.

BOOK XV

Argo in ambush—Medea goes to Iolchos, and by her wiles
 brings Pelias to his death.

BUT on the morrow did the Minyæ
 Turn Argo's head once more to Thessaly,
 And surely now the steersman knew his way,
 As island after island every day
 They coasted, with a soft land-wind abeam ;
 And now at last like to a troubled dream
 Seemed all the strange things they had seen ere-
 while,
 Now when they knew the very green sea's smile
 Beneath the rising and the setting sun,

And their return they surely now had won 10
 To those familiar things long left behind,
 When on their sails hard drave the western wind.

So past Euboea did they run apace,
 And swept with oars the perilous green race
 Betwixt Cerinthus and the islands white ;
 But, when they now had doubled that dread
 height,

The shields that glittered upon Argo's side
 They drew inboard, and made a shift to hide
 Her golden eye and gleaming braveries, 19
 And heaped the deck with bales of merchandize,
 And on their yard sails patched and brown they
 bent,

And crawling slowly, with six oars they went,
 Till Argo seemed like some Phœnician
 Grown old and leaky, on the water wan.

Now at the entering of their own green bay
 There lies an island that men call to-day
 Green Cicynethus, low, and covered o'er
 With close-set trees, and distant from the shore
 But some five furlongs, and a shallow sea
 'Twixt main and island ripples languidly, 30
 And on the shore there dwells not any man
 For many a mile ; so there Erginus ran
 Argo disguised, and steering skilfully,
 Cast anchor with the island on his lee ;
 Hid from the straits, and there struck sail and
 mast ;

Then to the island shore the heroes past,
 And with their wide war-axes 'gan to lop
 Full many a sapling with green-waving top
 And full-leaved boughs of spreading maple-trees,
 And covered Argo's seaward side with these.
 And then the shipmen did Medea bid 41

To hold a shallop ready, while she hid
 Her lovely body in a rough grey gown
 And heavy home-spun mantle coarse and brown,
 And round about her a great wallet slung,
 And to her neck an uncouth image hung
 Of Tauric Artemis, the cruel maid.

Then, all being ready, to the prince she said:—
 ‘O well-beloved, amongst our foes I go
 Alone and weak, nor do I surely know 50
 If I shall live or die there; but do thou
 Let one watch ever, who from off the prow
 Shall look towards white Iolchos o’er the bay,
 And watching, wait until the seventh day,
 And if no sign thou hast from me by then,
 Believe me slain at hands of wicked men,
 Or shut in some dark prison at the least,
 While o’er my head thy foe holds royal feast.

‘Then soothly if it lieth in thine heart
 To leave this land untouched, do thou thy part;
 Yet do I think thou wilt be man enow 61
 Unto the white-walled town to turn thy prow,
 And either die a man or live a king,
 Honoured of all, nor lacking anything
 But me thy love—whom thou wilt soon forget,
 When with thy tears my lone tomb has been wet
 A little space;—so be it, do thy will.
 And of all good things mayst thou have thy fill
 Before thou comest to the shadowy land
 Where thou wilt strive once more to touch mine
 hand, 70

And have no power e’en to meet these eyes
 That for thy love shall see such miseries.’

She ceased, nigh weeping, but he wept indeed,

52 Let one] Keep a

Such tears as come to men in utmost need,
When all words fail them, and the world seems
gone,

And with their love they fill the earth alone,
Careless of shame, and not remembering death.

But she clung round about him, with her
breath

Shortened with sobs, as she began to say :—

‘ Weep not, O love, for surely many a day 80

May we be merry and forget all ill,

Nor have I yet forgotten all my skill,

And ere the days are gone thou well mayst see

Thy deadly foe brought unto nought by me.

And if indeed the Gods give me the day,

Then shall thy wakeful watch see o’er the bay

Smoke in the day-time, red flame in the night,

Rise o’er Iolchos’ well-built walls and white ;

Then linger not, but run out every oar, 89

And hasten toward the many-peopled shore

That is thine own henceforth, as I am thine.’

Therewith from him she turned her face divine,

And reached the shallop over Argo’s side,

That o’er the shallows soon began to glide,

Driven by arms of strong Eurydamas ;

But when the keel dragged on the rank sea-grass,

She stepped ashore, and back the hero turned

Unto his fellows, who, with hearts that burned

Unto the quays to bring great Argo’s stem,

And gain the glory that was waiting them, 100

Watched ever for the sign across the bay,

Till nigh the dawning of the seventh day.

But from the shore unto a thick-leaved wood
Medea turned, drawing both cloak and hood
Right close about her, lest perchance some man,

Some hind, or fisher of the water wan,
Should wonder at her visage, that indeed
Seemed little worthy of that wretched weed.

In that thick wood a little stream there was,
That here was well-nigh hidden of the grass,
And there swelled into pools both clear and deep,
Wherein the images of trees did sleep, 112
For it was noontide of the summer day.

To such a pool Medea took her way,
And reaching it, upon the grass laid down
Her rough grey homespun cloak and wallet
brown ;

And when her eyes had swept the space around,
Undid her tunic, that upon the ground
Fell huddled round her feet ; nor did she spare
To strip the linen from her body fair, 120
And shoes from off her feet , then she drew near
The flowery edges of the streamlet clear,
And gazing down upon her image, stood,
Harkening the drowsy murmur of the wood ;
And since the wind was hushed that noon of
day,

And moveless down her back the long locks lay,
Her very self an image seemed to be,
Wrought in some wondrous faint-hued ivory,
Carved by a master among cunning men. 129

So still she stood, that the quick water-hen
Noted her not, as through the blue mouse-ear
He made his way ; the conies drew anear,
Nibbling the grass, and from an oak-twigh nigh
A thrush poured forth his song unceasingly.

But in a while, sighing, she turned away,
And, going up to where the wallet lay,
She opened it, and thence a phial drew
That seemed to be well wrought of crystal blue,

Which when she had unstopped, therefrom she
poured

Into the hollow of an Indian gourd, 140
A pale green liquor, wherefrom there arose
Such scent as o'er some poisonous valley blows,
Where nought but dull-scaled twining serpents
dwell,

Nor any more now could the Colchian smell
The water-mint, the pine-trees, or the flower
Of the heaped-up sweet odorous virgin's bower.

But shuddering, and with lips grown pale and
wan,

She took the gourd, and with shut eyes began
Therefrom her body to anoint all o'er ;
And this being done, she turned not any more
Unto the woodland brook, but hurrying, 151
Drew on her raiment, and made haste to sling
Her wallet round about her, nor forgot
The Tauric image, ere the lovely spot
She left unto the rabbit and the roe.

And now straight toward Iolchos did she go,
But as she went, a hideous, fearful change
Had come on her ; from sunken eyes and strange
She gazed around ; white grew her golden hair,
And seventy years her body seemed to bear ;
As though the world that coppice had passed by
For half an age, and caught her presently,
When from its borders once her foot had passed.

Then she began to murmur, as she cast
From changed eyes glances on her wrinkled
hands : 165

' O Jason ! surely not for many lands,
Rich and gold-bearing lands, would I do this ;
But yet with thee to gain good peace and bliss

Far greater things would I have done to-day.'

So saying, she made haste upon her way,
 Until at last, when it was well-nigh night,
 She reached the city crowned with towers white,
 And passing by the brazen gates of it, 173
 Forewearied, by the fountain did she sit ;
 Where, as she waited, came an ancient crone,
 Who, groaning, set her pitcher on the stone,
 And seeing the Colchian, asked her what she was.

'Mother,' Medea said, 'I strive to pass
 Unto fair Athens, where dwelt long ago
 My fathers, if perchance folk yet may know
 Where they lie buried, that on that same stone
 I may lie down and die ; a hapless one, 182
 Whom folk once called Aglaia, once called fair ;
 For years, long years ago, my golden hair
 Went down the wind, as carelessly I strayed
 Along the wet sea-beach, of nought afraid,
 And there my joy was ended suddenly,
 For on me fell the rovers of the sea, 188
 And bore me bound into the land of Thrace,
 And thence to some unnamed, far northern place,
 Where I, a rich man's daughter, learned to bear
 Fetters and toil and scourging year by year ;
 Till it has happed unto me at the last,
 Now that my strength for toil is overpast,
 That I am free once more, if that is aught,
 Whom in all wretched places death has sought,
 And surely now will find—but wilt thou give
 Some resting-place to me, that I may live
 Until I come to Athens and my grave ?
 And certainly, though nought of gold I have,
 In the far northland did I gather lore 201
 Of this and that amid my labour sore ;

And chiefly of this Goddess, rites I know,
 Whose image round my neck thou seest now,
 Well-shod Diana—and a whispered word
 Within her inmost temple once I heard
 Concerning this : how men may grow to be
 E'en as the Gods, and gain eternity,
 And how the work of years may be undone.'

When she had finished, the Thessalian crone,
 Filling her jar with water, turned and said :—

' Surely, Athenian, I am sore afraid, 212
 Ere thou hast learned thy lesson utterly,
 And gained that new life, thou thyself wilt die ;
 Nor will it profit me, who am a slave
 Wishing for death, a wretched life to save :
 But hearken now, if thou art wise and bold,
 Then will I show thee how thou mayst earn gold
 And thanks enow, by telling this thy tale
 Unto rich folk, for them will it avail 220
 To know thy secret ; rise, and come with me,
 And the king's daughters surely shalt thou see ;
 For on my road from nothing unto hell
 His palace is the last lodge where I dwell,
 And I am well aweary of it now,
 And of my toil, thanked with hard word and
 blow.'

' I thank thee, mother,' said the Colchian maid,
 ' Nor of king's daughters shall I be afraid,
 Whose ears Latona's daughter erst have heard,
 Nor trembled at the heavy dreadful word.'

Then on they passed, and as they went, the
 crone 231
 Told her how Æson unto death was done,
 And of the news that thither had been brought
 Of those that o'er the sea that glory sought.
 Namely, that when Æetes had been fain

To trap the Argo, all had been in vain,
 Yet had he gone back well-nigh satisfied ;
 For in the night to him a voice had cried
 Louder and clearer than a mortal can :—
 ‘ Go back to Æa, sun-begotten man, 240
 And there forget thy daughter and thy fleece,
 But yet be merry, for the thieves of Greece
 Shall live no longer than a poor wretch may
 Who lies unholpen on a lonely way
 Wounded, possessing nought but many woes,—
 Lo, thus it happeneth now unto thy foes ! ’

This, said the crone, a Colchian had told
 To Pelias, dweller in the house of gold,
 And had large gifts from him ; who when he
 knew

The certainty of this, old Æson slew 250
 With all his house who at Iolchos were.

‘ So,’ said she, ‘ if, for quieting his fear
 Of the sea-rover, such things he did give,
 What would his gifts be if thou mad’st him live
 His life again, with none of all his name
 Alive, to give him fear of death or shame ? ’
 With that they came unto the royal house
 Where Pelias dwelt, grown old and timorous,
 Oppressed with blood of those that he had slain,
 Desiring wealth and longer life in vain. 260

So there a court low-built the old crone sought,
 And to her lodging the tired Colchian brought,
 Where she might sleep, and gave her food and
 drink.

Then into sleep did wise Medea sink,
 And dreamed that she herself, made ever young,
 Gold-robed within some peaceful garden sung,
 Like that where dwelt the wise Hesperides.

But as she walked between the smooth-stemmed
trees

She saw the sea rise o'er the marble wall,
And rolling o'er, drown grass and flowers and
all, 270

And draw on towards her, who no whit could
move,

Though from the high land Jason, her own love,
Was shouting out to her, so then, at last,
She dreamed the waters over all had passed
And reached her feet, and o'er her coldly swept,
And still undrowned, beneath the waves she wept,
And still was Jason shouting to her there.

Therewith she woke, and felt the morning air
Cold on her face, because the ancient crone
Over her couch the casement had undone. 280

And as she oped her eyes, she heard her say :—
' Awake, O guest, for yet another day
We twain must bear before we gain our rest.
But now indeed I think it to be best
That to my ladies I alone should show
That prayers, and rites, and wonders thou dost
know,

Which thou wilt tell for gold ; for sure I deem
That to us dying folk nought good doth seem,
But hoarding for the years we shall not see.
So bide thou there, and I will come to thee
And bring thee word of what the queens may
say.' 291

Then with these words she went upon her way,
While in her place alone Medea sat,
With eager heart, thinking of this and that,
And wishing that the glorious day were come,
When she should set her love within his home,

A king once more. So 'mid these thoughts, there
came

Back to the place the wise Thessalian dame,
Who bade her rise and after her to go, 299
That she those marvels to the queens might show.

Therewith she brought her to a chamber where
Abode the royal maidens slim and fair,
All doing well-remembered works ; of whom
White-armed Alcestis sat before the loom,
Casting the shuttle swift from hand to hand.
The while Eradne's part it was to stand
Amongst the maids who carded out the wool
And filled the gleaming ivory shuttles full.
Amphinome, meantime, her golden head
Bent o'er the spinners of the milk-white thread,
And by the growing web still set aside 311
The many-coloured bundles newly dyed,
Blood-red, and heavenly blue, and grassy green,
Yea, and more colours than man yet has seen
In flowery meadows midmost of the May.

Then to the royal maids the crone 'gan say :—
' Behold the woman, O my mistresses,
Who 'midst the close-set gloomy northern trees
Has late learned that I told you of ; and ye
Who in this royal house live happily, 320
May well desire such life for evermore,
Which unto me were but a burden sore.'

Therewith she left them, but folk say, indeed,
That she who spoke was nought but Saturn's
seed,

In very likeness of that woman old,
Whose body soon folk came on, dead and cold,
Within the place where she was wont to dwell.
Now how these things may be, I cannot tell,

But certainly Queen Juno's will was good
 To finish that which, in the oaken wood 330
 Anigh the Centaur's cave, she first began,
 Giving good heart to the strange-nurtured man.

But, she being gone, fair-limbed Amphinome
 Said : ' Reverend mother, welcome here ye be,
 And in return for thy so hard-earned lore
 That thou wilt teach us, surely never-more
 Shalt thou do labour whilst thou dwellest here,
 But unto us shalt thou be lief and dear
 As though thou wert the best of all our blood.'

But, pondering awhile, Medea stood, 340
 Then answered : ' Lady, I am now grown old,
 And but small gifts to me were heaps of gold,
 Or rest itself, for that the tomb shall give ;
 I say all things are nought, unless I live
 So long henceforward, that I need not think
 When into nothing I at last must sink ;
 But take me now unto the mighty king
 That rules this land, and there by everything
 That he holds sacred, let him swear to me
 That I shall live in peace and liberty 350
 Till quiet death upon my head is brought ;
 But this great oath being made, things shall be
 wrought

By me, that never can be paid with gold ;
 For I will make that young which has grown old,
 And that alive that ye have seen lie dead.'

Then much they wondered at the words she
 said,
 And from the loom did fair Alcestis rise,
 And tall Amphinome withdrew her eyes
 From the fair spinners, and Eradne left
 The carding of the fine wool for the weft. 360

Then said Eradne : ' Mother, fear not thou,
 Surely our father is good man enow,
 And will not harm thee : natheless, he will swear
 By whatsoever thing he holdeth dear,
 Nor needst thou have a doubt of him at all.
 Come, for he sitteth now within the hall.'

With that, she took her shoes from off the ground
 And round her feet the golden strings she bound,
 As did her sisters, and fair cloaks they threw
 About them, and their royal raiment drew
 Through golden girdles, gemmed and richly
 wrought,

And forth with them the Colchian maid they
 brought. 37¹

But as unto the royal hall they turned,
 Within their hearts such hot desire burned
 For lengthening out the life they knew so sweet,
 That scarce they felt the ground beneath their
 feet,

And through the marble court long seemed the
 way.

But when they reached the place, glittering
 and gay 37⁸

With all the slain man's goods, and saw the king
 Wearing his royal crown and mystic ring,
 And clad in purple, and his wearied face,
 Anxious and cruel, gaze from Æson's place,
 A little thing it seemed to slay him there,
 As one might slay the lion in his lair,
 Bestrewn with bones of beast, and man, and
 maid.

Then as he turned to them, Alcestis said :—
 ' O lord and father, here we bring to thee
 A wise old woman, come from over sea, 38⁸
 Who 'mid the gloomy, close-set northern trees

Has heard the words of reverend Goddesses
 I dare not name aloud ; therefore she knows
 Why this thing perishes, and that thing grows,
 And what to unborn creatures must befall,
 And this, the very chiefest thing of all,
 To make the old man live his life again,
 And all the lapse of years but nought and vain ;
 But we, when these strange things of her we heard,
 Trembled before her, and were sore afeard,
 In 'midst of all our measureless desire
 Within thy veins and ours to set new fire, 400
 And with thee live for many a happy day,
 Whilst all about us passes soon away.'

Now paler grew the king's face at this word,
 And 'mid strange hopes he, too, grew sore afeard,
 As sighing, he began to think of days
 Now long gone by, when he was winning praise,
 And thought : ' If so be I should never die,
 Then would I lay aside all treachery,
 And here should all folk live without alarm,
 For to no man would I do any harm, 410
 Whatso might hap, but I would bring again
 The golden age, free from all fear and pain.'

But through his heart there shot a pang of fear,
 As to the queen he said : ' Why art thou here,
 Since thou hast mastered this all-saving art,
 Keeping but vagrant life for thine own part
 Of what thou boastest with the Gods to share ?
 Thou, but a dying woman, nowise fair.'

' Pelias,' she said, ' far from the north I come,
 But in Erectheus' city was my home, 420
 Where being alone, upon a luckless day,
 By the sea-rovers was I snatched away,
 And in their long-ship, with bound, helpless
 hands,

Was brought to Thrace, and thence to northern
lands,

Of one of which I scarcely know the name,
Nor could your tongue the uncouth letters frame.
There had I savage masters, and must learn
With aching back to bend above the quern ;
There must I learn how the poor craftsman
weaves, 429

Nor earn his wages ; and the barley-sheaves
Must bind in August ; and across the snow,
Unto the frozen river must I go,
When the white winter lay upon the land,
And therewithal must I dread many a hand,
And writhe beneath the whistle of the whip.

‘ Mid toils like these my youth from me did
slip,

Uncomforted, through lapse of wretched years,
Till I forgot the use of sobs and tears,
And like a corpse about my labour went,
Grown old before my time, and worn and bent.
And then at last this good to me betid, 441
That my wise mistress strove to know things hid
From mortal men, and doubted all the rest,
Babblers and young, who in our fox's nest
Dwelt through the hideous changes of the year :
Then me she used to help her, and so dear
I grew, that when upon her tasks she went,
Into all dangerous service was I sent ;
And many a time, within the woods alone, 449
Have I sat watching o'er the heaps of stone
Where dwell the giants dead ; and many a time
Have my pale lips uttered the impious rhyme
That calls the dead from their unchanged abode ;
Till on my soul there lay a heavy load
Of knowledge, not without reward, for I

No longer went in rags and misery,
 But in such bravery as there they had
 My toil-worn body now was fairly clad, 458
 And feared by man and maid did I become,
 And mistress of my mistress' dreary home.

' Moreover, whether that, being dead to fear,
 All things I noted, or that somewhat dear
 I now was grown to those dread Goddesses,
 I know not, yet amidst the haunted trees
 More things I learned than my old mistress did,
 Yea, some things surely from all folk else hid,
 Whose names once spoken would unroof this hall,
 And lay Iolchos underneath a pall
 Of quick destruction ; and when these were
 learned,

At last my mistress all her wage had earned,
 And to the world was dead for evermore. 471

' But me indeed the whole house hated sore,
 First for my knowledge, next that, sooth to say,
 I, when I well had passed my evil day,
 And came to rule, spared not my fellows aught ;
 Whereby this fate upon my head was brought,
 That flee I must lest worse should hap to me ;
 So on my way unto the Grecian sea
 With weary heart and manifold distress,
 My feet at last thy royal pavement press. 480
 My lips beseech thy help, O mighty King !
 Help me, that I myself may do the thing
 I most desire, and this great gift may give
 To thee and thine, from this time forth to live
 In youth and beauty while the world goes by
 With all its vain desires and misery.

' And if thou doubtest still, then hear me say
 The words thou spakst upon a long-past day,
 483 gift may give] gift give

When thou wert fearful, and the half-shod man
Had come upon thee through the water wan.'

She ceased awhile,⁵ and therewith Pelias, 491
With open mouth and eyes as fixed as glass,
Stared at her, wondering. Then again she said:—
'Awhile ago, when he thou knowest dead,
And he thou thinkest dead, were by thy side,
A crafty wile thou forgedst; at that tide
Telling the tale of Theban Athamas,
And how that Phryxus dead at Æa was.
Thinking (and not in vain) to light the fire
Of glorious deeds, and measureless desire 500
Of fame within the hearts of men o'erbold.

'For thus thou saidst: "So is the story told
Of things that happened forty years ago,
Nor of the Greeks has there been any one
To set the bones of Phryxus in a tomb,
Or mete out to the Colchian his due doom."

'So saidst thou then, and by such words didst
drive

Thy nephew in a hopeless game to strive,
Wherefore thou deemest wisely he is dead,
And all the words that he can say are said.'

She ceased again, while pale and shuddering,
Across his eyes the crafty, fearful king 512
Drew trembling hands. But yet again she
spoke:—

'What if the Gods by me the strong chain broke
Of thy past deeds, ill deeds wrought not in vain,
And thou with new desires lived again?
Durst I still trust thee with my new-gained life?
Who for the rest am not thy brother's wife,
Thy nephew, or thy brother. Be it so.
Yet since the foolish hearts of men I know,

Swear on this image of great Artemis 521
 That unto me thy purpose harmless is,
 Nor wilt thou do me hurt, or more or less.
 Then while thy lips the ivory image press,
 Will I call down all terrors that I know
 Upon thine head if thou shouldst break thy vow.
 ' Yet for thyself dost thou trust what I say,
 Or wilt thou still be dying day by day ? '

' Yea,' said the king, ' yea, whosoe'er thou art,
 Needs must I trust thee, in such wise my heart
 Desires life again when this is done. 531
 Give me the image, O thou fearful one,
 Who knowest all my life, who in the breath
 Wherein thou prayest help still threatenest
 death.'

Then on the image did she swear the king,
 But while he spoke was she still muttering,
 With glittering eyes fixed on him ; but at last,
 When from his lips the dreadful word had passed,
 She said : ' O King, pray that thou mayst not
 die

Before the fifth day's sun has risen high ; 540
 Yet on to-morrow morn shalt thou behold
 This hair of mine all glittering bright as gold,
 My tottering feet firm planted on the ground,
 My grey and shrivelled arms grown white and
 round,

As once, when by Ilissus' side I trod,
 A snare of beauty to a very God,
 To young men's eyes a fierce consuming fire.'

So saying, did she kindle fresh desire 548
 In the king's fainting heart, until he thought—
 ' Nay, if new life hereby to me is brought,

542 glittering bright as] glittering as

Withal there may be brought a lovely mate
 To share my happy days and scorn of fate.'
 Then did he bid his daughters straight to go
 With that wise woman, nor spare aught to do
 That she might bid them, and they wondering,
 But in their hearts yet fearful of the thing,
 Unto the women's chamber led her back,
 And bade her say what matters she might lack.

Then little did she ask unto her need,
 But fair cold water, and some fitting weed,
 And in a close-shut place to be alone, 561
 Because no eye must see the wonder done.

And 'Oh,' she said, 'fair women, haste ye now,
 For surely weaker every hour I grow,
 And fear to die ere I can live again.'
 Then through the house they hastened, and with
 pain

A brazen caldron their fair hands bore up,
 As well wrought over as a king's gold cup.
 Which in a well-hung chamber did they set,
 And filled with clear cold water, adding yet
 New raiment wrought about with ruddy gold,
 And snowy linen wrapped in many a fold.

Then did Medea turn unto the three, 573
 And said : 'Farewell, for no more shall ye see
 These limbs alive, or hear this feeble voice,
 For either shall my changed lips rejoice
 In my new beauty, or else stark and cold
 This wretched body shall your eyes behold.
 Wait now until six hours are over-passed,
 And if ye still shall find the door shut fast,
 Then let the men bring hammers, neither doubt
 That thence my corpse alone shall they bear out.
 But if the door is open or ajar, 583
 Draw nigh and see how great my helpers are,

And greet what there ye see with little fear,
For whatsoever may have touched me here,
By then, at least, shall no one be with me,
And nought but this old sorceress shall ye see
Grown young again ; alas ! grown young again !
Would God that I were past the fear and pain !

So said the Colchian; but their fearful eyes
Turned hastily from such hid mysteries 592
As there might lurk; and to their bower they gat,
And well-nigh silent o'er the weaving sat,
And did what things they needs must do that day,
Until that six hours' space had passed away.

Then had the sun set, and the whitening moon
Shone o'er the gardens where the brown bird's
tune

Was quivering through the roses red and white,
And sweeter smelt the sweet flowers with the
night ;

But to the chamber where there lay alone
The wise Medea, up the faint grey stone
Two rose-trees climbed, along a trellis led,
And with their wealth of blossoms white and red
Another garden of the window made.

So now the royal sisters, sore afraid,
Each with a taper in her trembling hand,
Before the fateful chamber-door did stand 608
And heard no noise ; whereon Amphinome
Pushed at the door, that yielded, and the three
Passing with beating hearts the oaken door,
Pressed noiseless feet upon the polished floor,
Reddening the moonshine with their tapers' light.

There they beheld the caldron gleaming bright,

600 the sweet flowers] the flowers

604 blossoms] flowers

And on the floor the heap of raiment rent
That erst had hid the body old and bent ;
And there a crystal phial they beheld
Empty, that once some wondrous liquor held ;
And by the window-side asleep they saw
The Colchian woman, white without a flaw
From head to heel ; her round arms by her side,
Her fair face flushed with sweet thoughts, as a
bride

Who waits the coming of some well-loved man.
Softly she breathed, the while the moonlight ran
In silver ripples o'er her hair of gold.

But when that loveliness they did behold,
They cried aloud for wonder, though not yet
Her happy dreaming thoughts would she forget,
But into spoken words her murmuring grew,
Though of their purport nought the sisters knew,
Since in the outland Colchian tongue she spoke ;
Then, while they waited, slowly she awoke,
And looking round her, still with half-shut eyes,
She said : ' O damsels, fain would I arise,
I hear the morning murmur of the birds 635
And lowing of released and hungry herds
Across the meadows, sweet with vetch and bean,
And the faint ripple of the Phasis green.'

But with that last word did she start upright,
Shading her grey eyes from the tapers' light,
And said : ' O queens, and are ye come to me
This eve, my triumph over time to see ? 642
And is my boast for nought ? behold me made
Like the fair casket-bearer who betrayed
The luckless man while yet the world was young.'
So saying did she speak as one who sung,
So sweet her voice was ; then she stepped adown

From off the silken couch, and rough and brown
They seemed beside her, fair maids though they
were.

But silently they stood, and wondered there,
And from their hearts had flown all thoughts at
last

But that of living while the world went past. 651

Then at her feet Alcestis knelt and prayed.—

‘ O, who can see thee, Goddess, unafraid ?

Yet thou thyself hast promised life to us,

More than man’s feeble life, and perilous,

And if thy promise now thou makest vain,

How can we live our thoughtless life again ?

Then, would thou ne’er hadst left thine heavenly
home, 659

And o’er the green Thessalian meadows come !’

Then spoke Medea : ‘ Young as ye see me

The king, your father, in few days shall be,

And when that he has gained his just reward,

Your lives from death and danger will I guard.

Natheless no Goddess am I, but no more

Than a poor wanderer from shore to shore,

Though loved by her the swift of Goddesses,

Who now is glancing ’twixt the dark grey trees,

E’en while we speak. Now leave me to my rest,

For this new-changed body is oppressed 670

By all the thoughts that round my heart will
throng

Of ancient days, and hopes forgotten long ;

Go, therefore, but come hither with the sun

To do my bidding ; then shall there be done

Another marvel ere the morn comes round,

If yet ye three are dwelling above ground.’

Then, trembling, they unto their chamber
passed,

But, they being gone, she made the strong door
fast,

And soon in deep sleep on the couch she lay
Until the golden sun brought back the day ;
Nor could she fail arising to be glad 681
That once again her own fair form she had,
And as the fresh air met her pleasantly,
She smiled, her image in the bath to see
That had been lost since at the noon she stood
Beside the still pool in the lonely wood ;
And she rejoiced her combed-out hair to bind,
And feel the linen in the morning wind
Fluttering about, in kissing side and limb,
And it was sweet about her ankles slim 690
To make the gemmed thongs of the sandals meet,
With rosy fingers touching her soft feet.

But she being clad, there came the ladies three,
Who seemed by her but handmaidens to be ;
And such indeed they were, as dumb with awe
In the fresh morn that loveliness they saw.

Then said Medea : ' Fair queens well be ye !
Surely in happy hour ye come to me,
Who, if I might, would do the whole world good.
But now take heed ; is there some close dark
wood 700

Anigh the town ?—thither will we to-night,
And in that place, hidden from all men's sight,
Shall ye see wonders passing human thought.
But thither, by your hands there must be brought
Some ancient beast at very point to die,
That ye may see how loved an one am I
By dreadful Gods ; there, too, must ye convey
A brazen caldron ere the end of day,
And nigh the place there must not fail to be
Some running stream to help our mystery.

Yet more ; take heed that She who helpeth me,
 Whose name I name not, willeth not to see
 The robes of kings and queens upon her slaves ;
 Therefore, if ye would please the one who saves,
 This night must ye be clad in smocks of black,
 And all adornment must your bodies lack,
 Nor must there be a fillet on your hair, 717
 And the hard road must feel your feet all bare.'

'Lady,' Eradne said, 'all shall be done,
 Nor wilt thou yet have had beneath the sun
 More faithful servants than we are to thee ;
 But wilt thou not the king my father see,
 And gladden him, that he may give thee things
 Such as the heart desires—the spoil of kings ?'

'Nay,' said Medea, 'much have I to think
 Ere the hot sun beneath the sea shall sink,
 And much to call to mind, and for your sake
 Unto my Helper many a prayer to make.'

With that they went, and she, being left alone,
 Took up the image of the swift-foot one, 730
 Which for a hidden casket served her well,
 And wherein things were laid right strange to tell.
 So this and that she looked at, and the while
 She muttered charms learned in the river isle.

But at the noontide did they bring her food,
 Saying that all was ready in the wood,
 And that the night alone they waited now,
 Ere unto them those marvels she might show.
 Therefore Medea bade them come again 739
 When all the house of peaceful sleep was fain,
 And nought was stirring : so at dead of night
 They came to her in black apparel dight,
 Bearing like raiment for the Colchian,
 Who did it on before their faces wan
 And troubled eyes ; then out of gates they stole,

Setting their faces to the wished-for goal.

Now nigh Anaurus a blind pathway leads
Betwixt the yellow corn and whispering reeds,
The home of many a shy, quick-diving bird ;
Thereby they passed, and as they went they
heard 750

Splashing of fish. and ripple of the stream ;
And once they saw across the water's gleam
The black boat of some fisher of the night,
And from the stream had drawn back in affright,
But that the Colchian whispered : ' Wise be ye,
Thessalian sisters, yet with certainty
Make onward to the wood, for who indeed,
Beholding our pale faces and black weed,
Would come the nigher to us ? Would not he
Think that some dread things we must surely be,
And tremble till we passed ? Haste, for the night
Is waning now, and danger comes with light.'
Then on they passed, and soon they reached the
wood, 763

And straight made for the midst of it, where stood
An old horned ram bound fast unto a tree,
Which the torch-bearer, tall Amphinome,
Showed to Medea. and not far therefrom
Unto a brazen caldron did they come,
Hidden with green boughs ; then Medea bade
That by their hands a high pile should be made
Of fallen wood, and all else fit to burn ; 771
Which done, unto the caldron did they turn
And bore it to the river, and did strain
Their fair round arms to bear it back again
When it was filled, and raised it on the pile.
And then with hands unused to service vile
Lit up the fire, while Medea took
Dried herbs from out her wallet, which she shook

Into the caldron ; till at last a cloud
 Rose up therefrom and the dark trees did
 shroud. 780

Then did she bid them the old ram to lead
 Up to the caldron's side, and with good heed
 To quench his just departing feeble life ;
 So in his throat Eradne thrust the knife,
 While in the white arms of Amphinome
 And fair Alcestis, bleating piteously,
 Feebly he struggled ; so being slain at last,
 Piecemeal his members did the sisters cast
 Into the seething water : then drew back
 And hid their faces in their raiment black, 790
 The while Medea midst the flickering light
 Still sprinkled herbs from out her fingers white,
 And in a steady voice at last did say :—

‘ O thou that turnest night into the day,
 O thou the quencher of unhallowed fire,
 The scourge of hot, inordinate desire,
 Hast thou a mind to help me on this night,
 That wrong may still be wrong, and right be
 right

In all men's eyes ? A little thing I ask
 Before I put an ending to my task.’ 800

Scarce had she finished, ere a low black cloud
 Seemed closing o'er the forest, and aloud
 Medea cried : ‘ Oh, strong and terrible !
 I fear thee not, do what may please thee well.’
 Then as the pale Thessalians with affright
 Crouched on the earth, forth leapt the lightning
 white

Over their shrinking heads, and therewithal
 The thunder crashed, and down the rain did fall,
 As though some angry deity were fain
 To make a pool of the Thessalian plain. 810

Till in a while it ceased, and all was stilled
 Except the murmur of some brook new-filled,
 And dripping of the thick-leaved forest trees
 As they moved gently in the following breeze.
 Yet still King Pelias' daughters feared to rise,
 And with wet raiment still they hid their eyes,
 And trembled, and white-armed Amphinome
 Had dropped the long torch of the resin-tree,
 That lay half-charred among the tall wet grass.
 But unto them did wise Medea pass, 820
 And said : ' O daughters of the sea-born man,
 Rise up, for now the stars are growing wan,
 And the grey dawn is drawing near apace ;
 Nor need ye fear to see another face
 Than this of mine, and all our work is done
 We came to do.'

Then slowly, one by one,
 The sisters rose, and, fearful, drew anigh
 The place where they had seen the old ram die ;
 And there beheld, by glimmering twilight grey,
 Where on its side the brazen caldron lay, 830
 And on the grass and flowers that hid the ground,
 Half-charred extinguished brands lay all around,
 But yet no token of the beast was there ;
 But 'mid the brands a lamb lay, white and fair,
 That now would raise his new-born head and
 bleat,

And now would lick the Colchian's naked feet,
 As close he nestled to her : then the three
 Drew nigh unto that marvel timidly, 838
 And gazed at him with wide eyes wondering.

Thereat Medea raised the new-changed thing
 In her white arms, and smiled triumphantly,
 And said : ' What things the Gods will do for me
 Ye now behold ; take, then, this new-born beast,

And hope to sit long ages at the feast,
 And this your youth and loveliness to keep
 When all that ye have known are laid asleep.
 Yet steel your hearts to do a fearful thing,
 Ere this can happen, for unto the king
 Must your hands do what they have done to-night
 To this same beast. And now, to work aright
 What yet is needful to this mystery, 851
 Will be four days' full bitter toil for me.
 Take heed that silence, too, on this ye keep,
 Or else a bitter harvest shall ye reap.'

So said she, willing well indeed to know,
 Before the promised sign she dared to show,
 What honour Pelias in Iolchos had,
 And if his death should make his people sad.

But now they turned back on their homeward
 way,
 Fleeing before the coming of the day; 860
 Nor yet the flinty way their feet did feel,
 Nor their wet limbs the wind, that 'gan to steal
 From out the north-west ere the sun did rise.
 And swiftly though they went, yet did their eyes
 Behold no more than eyes of those that dream
 The crumbling edges of the swirling stream,
 Or fallen tree-trunks or the fallow rough.
 But Juno sent them feeling just enough
 By the lone ways to come unto the town 869
 And fair-walled palace, and to lay them down
 Upon their fragrant beds, that stood forlorn
 Of their white bodies, waiting for the morn
 In chambers close-shut from the dying night.

But since Medea fain would know aright
 What the folk willed to Pelias in the town,
 858 And if his death would make folk glad or sad.

Early next day she did on her the brown
 And ragged raiment, and the sisters told
 That she must find the place where herbs were
 sold,

And there buy this and that; therewith she
 went 879

About the town, seeming crook-backed and bent;
 And, hidden in her mantle and great hood,
 Within the crowded market-place she stood,
 And marked the talk of all the busy folk,
 And ever found that under Pelias' yoke
 All people groaned: and therefore with good
 heart

She set herself to work out all her part.

For, going back, till the fifth day was gone
 She dwelt within her chamber all alone,
 Except that now and then the sisters came
 To bring her food; and whiles they saw a flame,
 Strange-coloured, burning on the hearth, while
 she 891

Was bending o'er it, muttering wearily,
 And whiles they saw her bent o'er parchment
 strange,

And letters that they knew not; but no change
 They ever saw upon her lovely face.

But at the last, she, mindful of the place
 Where lay fair Argo's glorious battered keel,
 And that dread hidden forest of bright steel,
 Said to Eradne, when her food she brought
 Upon the sixth morn: 'Sister, I have thought
 How best to carry out the mystery 901
 That is so dear at heart to thee and me,
 And find that this night must the thing be
 done,

So seek a place where we may be alone,

High up, and looking southward o'er the bay ;
 Thither ere midnight must ye steal away,
 And under a huge caldron set dry brands.
 And that being done, take sharp swords in your
 hands,

And while I watch the sea, and earth, and air,
 Go ye to Pelias' well-hung chamber fair ; 910
 There what ye will ye may most surely do,
 If ye will work the way I counsel you.'
 Therewith a phial in her hand she set,
 And said : ' Who tasteth this will soon forget
 Both life and death, and for no noise will wake
 In two days' space ; therefore this phial take,
 And with the king's drink see ye mingle it,
 As well ye may, and let his servants sit
 O'er wine so honied at the feast to-night.
 Then certes shall their sleep not be so light,
 That bare feet pattering quick across the floor,
 Or unused creaking of an open door, 922
 Shall rouse them ; though no deadly drug it is,
 But bringer of kind sleep and dreamy bliss.

'But now, what think'st thou ? Are your hearts
 so good,

That ye will dare to shed your father's blood
 That he may live for ever ?—then is he
 The luckiest of all men. But if ye 928
 Draw back now, after all my prayers and tears,
 Then were it best that ye should end your fears
 By burning me with quick fire ere to-night.
 And yet not thus should ye lead lives aright,
 And free from fear ; because the sandalled queen
 Doth ever keep a memory fresh and green
 For all her faithful servants—ye did see
 Late in the green-wood how she loveth me.—

921 pattering quick across] pattering across

'Therefore be wise, and when to-night ye draw
 The sharp-edged steel, glittering without a flaw,
 Cast fear and pity from you. Pity him
 I bid you rather, who with shrunk limb 940
 And sunken eyes, remembers well the days
 When in the ranks of war he garnered praise
 Which unarmed, feeble, as his last year ends
 Babbling amongst the elders now he spends.
 Such shall not Pelias be, but rather now
 The breath of new life past misdeeds shall blow
 Adown the wind, and, taught by his old life,
 Shall he live honoured, free from fear or strife.'

'Fear not,' Eradne said, 'our will to-night,
 For all thy bidding will we do outright, 950
 Since still a Goddess thou dost seem to be
 To us poor strugglers with mortality.
 And for the secret spot this night we need,
 Close to the sea a place I know indeed,
 Upon the outskirts of this palace fair;
 And on this night of all nights, close by there
 My father sleeps, as oft his custom is,
 When he is fain a Mysian girl to kiss,
 Sea-rovers sold to him three months agoe.
 There after midnight we shall be alone 960
 Beyond all doubt, since this place by the sea
 A temple is of some divinity,
 Whose very name men now have clean forgot,
 And, as folk think, ill spirits haunt the spot:
 So all men fear it sore, but soothly we
 Fear nought of all these things, being led by
 thee.'

She ceased, and from the Colchian won much
 praise,
 And promises of many happy days.
 Then as upon the door she laid her hand,

Medea said : ' When midnight hides the land,
 Come here to me, and bring me to that place ;
 Then look the last upon your father's face 972
 As ye have known it for these eighteen years,
 Furrowed by eld and drawn by many fears ;
 But when ye come, in such guise be ye clad
 As in the wood that other night ye had.'
 Then did Eradne leave her, and the day
 Through sunshine and through shadow passed
 away.

But with the midnight came the sisters three,
 To lead her to that temple by the sea, 980
 And in black raiment had they hurried there,
 With naked feet, and unadorned loose hair,
 E'en as the other night Medea bade,
 Except that each one had a trenchant blade
 Slung round her neck, wherewith to do the deed.

Of these Alcestis trembled like the reed
 Set midmost of some quickly running stream,
 But with strange fire Eradne's eyes did gleam,
 And a bright flush was burning on her cheek,
 As still her fingers the sharp steel did seek ; 990
 While tall Amphinome, grown pale and white
 Beyond all measure, gazed into the night
 With steady eyes, as with the queen they went
 To that lone place to work out their intent.

So when all courts and corridors were passed,
 Unto the ancient fane they came at last,
 And found it twofold ; for below there stood
 Square marble pillars, huge, and red as blood,
 And wrought all o'er with fretting varying much ;
 Heavy they were, and nowise like to such 1000
 As men built in the lands Medea knew,
 Or in the countries fate had led her through :

But they, set close and thick, aloft did hold
A well-wrought roof, where still gleamed scraps
of gold,

That once told tales of Gods none living praise ;
And on this roof some king of later days
Had built another temple long before 1007

The Minyæ came adown unto that shore
From fair Orchomenus, of whose rites indeed
And to what Gods the victim then did bleed,
Men knew but little ; but therein there rose
Fair slim white pillars set in goodly rows,
And garlanded with brazen fruit and flowers,
That gleaming once, through lapse of many
hours,

Now with black spirals wrapt the pillars white.
But this fair fane was open to the night
On one side only, toward the restless sea ;
And there a terrace, wrought full cunningly,
Clear of the pillars hung above the sand.

Now went those maids, groping with out-
stretched hand 1020

Betwixt the pillars of the undercroft,
Until they reached a stair that led aloft
Into the windy, long-deserted fane
Of younger days ; but when their feet did gain
The open space above the murmuring sea,
In whispers did the queens of Thessaly
Show to the Colchian where the great pile was,
Built 'neath a vessel of bright polished brass,
And many water-jars there stood around ;
And as they spoke, to them, the faint low
sound 1030

Of their own whispered voices seemed as loud
As shouts that break from out the armed crowd
Of warriors ready for the fight.

But she
 Spoke with no lowered voice, and said : ' O ye !
 Be brave to-night, and thenceforth have no fear
 Of God or man since ye to me are dear.
 Light up the torches, because certainly
 Those that may see them gleaming o'er the sea
 Will think they light but spirits of the air.'
 Then presently the torches out did flare, 1040
 And lighted up the smile upon her face
 And the tall pillars of the holy place,
 And the three sisters gazing at her there,
 Wild-looking, with the sea-wind in their hair,
 And scant black raiment driven from their feet.

But when her eyes their fearful eyes did meet,
 With wild appealing glances as for aid,
 Some little pity touched the Colchian maid,
 Some vague regret for their sad destiny.
 But to herself she said : ' So must it be, 1050
 And to such misery shall such a king
 Lead wife and child, and every living thing
 That trusts him.' Then she said, ' Leave me alone,
 And go and do that which were better done
 Ere any streak of dawn makes grey the sky.
 And come to me when ye have seen him lie
 Dead to his old life of misdeeds and woe.'

Then voiceless from the torchlight did they go
 Into the darkness, and she, left alone,
 Set by the torches till the deed was done 1060
 Within the pillars, and turned back again
 With eager eyes to gaze across the main,
 But nothing she beheld by that starlight
 But on the beach the line of breakers white,
 And here and there, above the unlit grey,
 Some white-topped billow dotting the dark bay.

Then, sighing, did she turn her-self around
 And looked down toward the plot of unused
 ground, 1068

Whereby they passed into that fateful place,
 And gazed thereon with steadfast wary face,
 And there the pavement, whitened by the wind,
 Betwixt the turf she saw, and nigh it, twined
 About a marble image carelessly,
 A white wild-rose, and the grey boundary
 Of wind-beat stone, through whose unhinged
 door

Their stealthy feet had passed a while before.

Nought else she saw for a long dreary hour,
 For all things lay asleep in bed or bower,
 Or in the little-lighted mountain caves,
 Or 'neath the swirling streams and toppling
 waves. 1080

She trembled then, for in the eastern sky
 A change came, telling of the dawning nigh,
 And with swift footsteps she began to pace
 Betwixt the narrow limits of the place ;
 But as she turned round toward the close once
 more

Her eyes beheld the pavement by the door
 Hid by some moving mass ; then joyfully
 She waved her white arms toward the murmur-
 ing sea, 1088

And listened trembling, and although the sound
 Of breakers that the sandy sea-beach ground
 Was loud in the still night, yet could she hear
 Sounds like the shuffling steps of those that bear
 Some heavy thing, and as she gazed, could see
 The thin black raiment of the sisters three
 Blown out, and falling backward as they bent
 Over some burden, and right slowly went ;

And 'twixt their arms could she behold the gleam
 Of gold or gems, or silver-broidered seam,
 Till all was hidden by the undercroft. 1099
 And then she heard them struggling bear aloft
 That dreadful burden, and then went to meet,
 With beating heart, their slow ascending feet,
 Taking a half-burnt torch within her hand.

There by its light did she behold them stand
 Breathless upon the first stone of that fane,
 And with no word she beckoned them again
 To move on toward the terrace o'er the sea,
 And, turning, went before them silently.

And so at last the body down they laid
 Close by the caldron, and Eradne said :— 1110
 ' O thou, our life and saviour ! linger not,
 We pray thee now ! because our hearts are hot
 To see our father look with other eyes
 Upon the sea, the green earth, and the skies,
 And praise us for this seeming impious deed.'

Not heeding her, Medea saw the weed
 She erst beheld all glittering in the hall,
 And that same mantle as a funeral pall
 Which she had seen laid over either knee,
 The wonder of King Æson's treasury, 1120
 Which wise Phœnicians for much coined gold,
 And many oxen, years ago had sold
 To Æson, when folk called him king and lord.

Then to the head she went, and with no word
 The white embroidered linen drew away
 Over the face of the dead man, that lay
 As though she doubted yet what thing it was,
 And saw indeed the face of Pelias. 1128

Then o'er her pale face a bright flush there came,
 And, turning, did she set the torches' flame

Unto the dry brands of the well-built pyre,
 And, standing back, and waving from the fire
 The shuddering girls, somewhat thereon she cast,
 Like unto incense : then with furious blast
 Shot up a smokeless flame into the air,
 Quivering and red, nor then did she forbear
 To cry aloud, in her old Colchian tongue,
 Proud words, and passionate, that strangely rung
 Within the poor bewildered sisters' ears, 1139
 Filling their hearts with vague and horrid fears.

'O love!' she said, 'O love! O sweet delight! .
 Hast thou begun to weep for me this night,
 Dost thou stretch out for me thy mighty hands—
 The feared of all, the graspers of the lands?
 Come then, O love, across the dark seas come,
 And triumph as a king in thine own home,
 While I, the doer of a happy deed,
 Shall sit beside thee in this wretched weed;
 That folk may know me by thine eyes alone
 Still blessing me for all that I have done. 1150
 Come, king, and sit upon thy father's seat,
 Come, conquering king, thy conqueror love to
 meet!'

But as she said these words the luckless three
 Stared at her glowing face all helplessly,
 Nor to their father's corpse durst turn their eyes,
 While in their hearts did fearful thoughts arise.
 But now Medea, ceasing, fed the fire
 With that same incense, and the flame rose higher,
 A portent to the dwellers in the town,
 Unto the shepherd waking on the down, 1160
 A terror telling of ill things to be.

But from the God-built tower of Thessaly,

1147 a happy] this happy

Grey Pelion, did the centaur Cheiron gaze,
 And when he saw that ruddy flame outblaze,
 He smiled, and said: 'So comes to pass the word
 That in the forests of the north I heard,
 And in such wise shall love be foiled, and hate,
 And hope of gain, opposing steadfast fate.'

So to the flowery eastern slopes he gat, 1169
 Waiting the dawn, nor hoped for this or that.

BOOK XVI

The landing of the heroes—Jason is made king in Iolchos,
 and the Argonauts go to their own homes.

BUT other watchers were there on that night,
 Who saw the birth of that desired light
 From nigh green Cicynethus' woody shore.

For in mid-channel there, with every oar
 Run out, and cable ready for the slip,
 Did Jason hold his glorious storm-tossed ship,
 While in the top did keen-eyed Lynceus stand,
 And every man had ready to his hand
 Sharp spear, and painted shield, and grinded
 sword.

Thus as they waited, suddenly the word 10
 Rang out from Jason's mouth, and in the sea
 The cable splashed, and straight the Minyæ
 Unto their breasts the shaven ash-trees brought,
 And, as the quivering blades the water caught,
 Shouted for joy, and quickly passed the edge
 Of Cicynethus, green with reed and sedge.
 And whitening the dark waters of the bay,
 Unto Iolchos did they take their way.

Meanwhile the Colchian queen triumphantly
 Watched the grey dawn steal forth above the
 sea,

Still murmuring softly in the Colchian tongue,
 While o'er her head ~~the~~ flickering fire yet hung,
 And in the brazen caldron's lips did gleam ;
 Wherefrom went up a great white cloud of steam,
 To die above their heads in that fresh air.
 But Pelias' daughters, writhing in despair,
 Silent for dread of her, she noted nought,
 Nor of the dead man laid thereby she thought.

At last came forward tall Amphinome,
 And said : ' O Queen, look o'er the whitening sea,
 And tell us now what thing it is we lack ³¹
 To bring our father's vanished breathing back
 With that new life, whereof thou spak'st to us.'
 So in a broken voice and piteous
 She spoke ; but when no answer came at all,
 Nor did Medea's grey eyes on her fall,
 She cried again : ' O, art thou pitiless ?
 Wilt thou not note our measureless distress ?
 Wilt thou not finish that thou hast begun ?
 Lo, in a little while the piercing sun ⁴⁰
 Shall find us slayers of our father here.
 Then if thou hast no pity, hast thou fear ?
 We are king's daughters still, and with us still
 Are men who heed nought but to do our will ;
 And if thou fall'st into the hands of these,
 Thou shalt lament the gloomy northern trees
 And painless death of threescore years and ten,
 And little shall thy beauty help thee then.'

So cried she shrilly in her gathering ire ;
 But when Medea answered not, the fire ⁵⁰
 Burnt out within her heart, and on her knees
 She fell, and cried : ' O crown of Goddesses,
 Forgive these impious words, and answer me,
 Else shall I try if the green heaving sea

22 fire yet hung] fire hung

Will hide from all these impious blood-stained
hands,

Or bear them far away to savage lands,
That know no good or evil ; O speak, speak !
How can I pray thee when all words are weak ?
What gifts, what worship, shall we give to thee ?

E'en as she spoke, Medea seemed to see 60
A twinkling light far off amidst the bay,
Then from the suppliant hand she drew away,
Nor turned to her ; but looking seaward still,
She cried : ' O love ! yet shalt thou have thy fill
Of wealth, and power, and much desired fame,
Nor shall the Grecian folk forget my name
Who dearly bought these for thee ; therefore
come,

And with the sun behold thy wished-for home.'
So spoke she, and no less the wretched three
Beheld that light grow greater o'er the sea, 70
And therewithal the grey dawn coming fast,
And from them now well-nigh all hope had passed.
But fair Alcestis, grovelling on the ground,
And crying out, cast both her arms around
Medea's knees, and panting, and half-dead,
Poured forth wild words, nor knew the words she
said.

While the two others, mad with their despair,
Ran wailing through the pillars here and there,
Nor knew indeed what thing had come on them,
For now, at last, fair Argo's plunging stem
Medea saw in the still gathering light, 81
And round about her the sea beaten white
With steady oars ; then she looked down, and
said :

' What ! art thou praying for the newly dead,
For him who yesterday beheld the sun ?

And dost thou think that I am such an one
That what the Gods have unmade I can make ?
Lo ! with the dead shall Pelias awake,
And see such things as dead men's eyes may see.'

Then as Alcestis, moaning wretchedly, 90
Fell back upon the pavement, thus she said :—
' Take comfort yet, and lift again thine head,
O foolish woman ! Dost thou think that fate
Has yet been stopped by any love or hate,
Or fear of death, or man's far-shouted fame ?
And still doubt not that I, who have to name
The wise Medea, in such ways as this
Have long been struggling for a life of bliss
I shall not gain ; and thus do all men do,
And win such wages as have happened to you.

' Rise up and gaze at what the fates have
wrought, 101
And all the counsels they have brought to nought
On this same morn. Hearken the dash of oars
That never more ye thought would brush these
shores ;

Behold the man stand on the high-raised prow
That this dead man so surely dead did know.
See how he raises in his conquering hand
The guarded marvel of the Colchian land,
This dead king deemed hid death and unknown
woe.

See how his folk ashore the grapnels throw ;—
And see, and see ! beneath the risen sun, 111
How fair a day for this land is begun.
And let king Pelias rise if now he can,
And stop the coming of the half-shod man.'

E'en as she spoke, the keel had touched the
sand,

And catching up her raiment in her hand,
 She ran with speed, and gained the temple close,
 Made fragrant with that many-flowered white
 rose,

And o'er its daisied grass sped toward the beach;
 But when her feet the wrinkled sand did reach,
 There, nigh the ship, alone did Jason stand, ¹²¹
 Holding two spears within his ready hand;
 And right and left he peered forth warily,
 As though he thought some looked-for thing to see.

But when he saw her hurrying him to meet,
 With wild wind-tangled hair, and naked feet,
 And outstretched hands, and scanty raiment black,
 But for one moment did he start aback,
 As if some guardian spirit of the land ¹²⁹
 Had come upon him; but the next, his hand
 Had caught her slim wrist, and he shouted out:
 'Ashore, O heroes! and no more have doubt
 That all is well done we have wished were done;
 By this my love, by this the glorious one,
 The saviour of my life, the Queen of Love,
 To whom alone of all who are above,
 Or on the earth, will I pour wine, or give
 The life of anything that once did live.'

Then all men shouting, leapt forth on the sand,
 And stood about them, shield and spear in hand,
 Rejoicing that their mighty task was done;
 But as he saw the newly-risen sun ¹⁴²

Shine on the town, upon their left that lay,
 Then, smiling joyously, did Jason say:—

'O heroes, tell me, is the day not won?
 Look how the sun's rays now are stealing on,
 And soon will touch that temple's marble feet
 Where stood the king our parting keel to greet,

118 many-flowered white rose] many-flowered rose

But the great golden image of the God
 Holds up, unlighted yet, his crystal rod, 150
 And surely ere the noon shall gleam on it
 Upon my father's throne his son shall sit,
 Hedged round with spears of loyal men and true,
 And all be done that we went forth to do.'

But, 'midst their shouting, spoke the queen
 again :—

' Jason, behold hereby this ancient fane—
 Amidst its pillars let the heroes go
 Until a marble stair they come unto,
 And thereby mount into a pillared place,
 At end whereof, upon an open space 160
 Hung o'er the beach, that fire shall they see
 That lighted you to finish gloriously
 Your glorious journey ; and beside the fire
 There shall they find the slayer of thy sire,
 Who, soothly, shall not flee from them to-day,
 Nor curse the men who carry him away.'

Then forth Menœtius and Nauphius stood,
 Lynceus the keen, and Apheus of the wood,
 To do the thing that she would have them do,
 While unto Argo did Medea go, 170
 And for the last time scaled the sea-beat side ;
 There 'midst her silken curtains did she hide,
 And taking forth the fairest weed she had,
 In many a fragrant fold her body clad,
 And on her feet bound golden sandals fair,
 And set a golden garland on her hair.

But when again she reached the shell-strewn
 sand
 She saw the shielded heroes wondering stand
 About the new-slain body of the king,
 Not knowing yet whose hands had wrought the
 thing. 180

For, scared amid their woe and misery,
 By clash of arms, the wretched sisters three
 Were lurking yet within the undercroft,
 Amongst the close-set pillars, thinking oft
 That now the whole round world should be
 undone.

But while they trembled, Æson's glorious son
 Bade men make onward toward the market-place,
 That there he might the wondering townsfolk face
 For war or peace whichever it might be ;

But first upon a great oar carefully 190
 They bound a spar crosswise, and hung thereon
 That guarded marvel that their arms had won,
 And as a banner bore it well aloft.

And fair Medea, upon cushions soft,
 Laid upon spear-staves did they bear along,
 Hedged round with glittering spears and bucklers
 strong,

And unarmed, fearless, mighty Jason led
 Their joyous march, next whom, the man just
 dead,

The strong-armed heroes upon spear-shafts bore,
 With dark blue sea-cloaks deftly covered o'er.

So, following up the poor unkingly bier 201
 Of him who erst, for love of gain and fear,
 Had sent them forth to what he deemed their
 end,

They through the palace courts began to wend,
 Not stayed of any, since the guards indeed
 Still slept, made heavy by the drowsy weed
 Eradne in their wine erewhile did steep.

And other folk, just risen from their sleep,
 Looked from the windows 'mazed ; and like
 a dream

The queen, enthroned on golden cloths did seem,

And like a dream the high-raised, glittering
Fleece, 211

And that new-slain long-hated pest of Greece.
And some indeed there were who saw full well
What wondrous tale there would be now to tell;
Who the glad setting forth did not forget,
Unto whose eyes more fair, more glorious yet
The heroes showed, than when the sunny bay
First felt their keel upon a happy day.
Then, crying out for joy, beheld the Fleece,
And that fair Helper who had saved for Greece
The godlike heroes, and amidst of these 221
Seemed not the least of heavenly Goddesses.

Withal they reached at last the brazen gate
Of Æson's house, outside of which did wait
Men armed and shouting, for that dawn a man
None knew, a fisher on the water wan,
From house to house among the folk had gone,
Who said, that being in his own boat alone,
Casting his nets a little time before 229
The dawn, he heard the sound of many an oar,
And looking round, beheld a glittering prow
That he for Argo's armed beak did know;
And as he gazed, her many-coloured side
Dashed past him like a dream with flood of tide,
As for the far-off ancient fane she made;
And that thereon his anchor straight he weighed,
And made good haste the landing-place to gain.
'For certes,' said he, 'Pelias is slain,
And we are free once more.' So saying, he passed
From house to house, and reached the gates at
last; 240

Nor any saw him more on land or sea,
And, certes, none but clear-voiced Mercury
219 Then] They 228 his own boat] his boat

Spoke in that man by helpful Juno made,
No body, soothly, but a hollow shade.

Now, therefore, when the gates were open wide,
Shouting, the folk drew back on either side,
All wild with joy ; but when they did behold
The high-raised Fleece of curling ruddy gold,
And the glad heroes' mighty heads beneath,
And throned Medea, with her golden wreath,
And folded hands, and chiefest thing of all, 251
The godlike man who went beside the pall,
Whereon the body of their tyrant lay,
Then did their voices fail them on that day,
And many a man of weeping there was fain.

At last did Jason set his foot again
Upon the steps of that same ivory throne
Where once he fronted Pelias all alone, 258
And bare of friends : but now he turned about,
And, 'mid the thunder of the people's shout,
Scarce heard his fellows' spears : and by his side
There stood his gold-adorned Colchian bride,
With glad tears glistening in her sweet grey eyes :
And dead, at end of foiled treacheries,
There lay his foe, the slayer of his kin.

Then did he clasp the hand that lay within
His mighty and sword-hardened fingers brown,
And cried aloud above the shouting town .—

' Tell me, O people of my father's land, 269
Before whose ivory well-wrought throne I stand,
And whose fair-towered house mine eyes behold,
Glittering with brazen pillars, rich with gold ?

' A while ago we sailed across the sea,
To meet our deaths, if so the thing must be,
And there had died, had not the kind Gods been,

Who sent to us this lovely Colchian queen
 To be our helper : many a land we saw
 That knoweth neither tongue of man, or law
 Of God or man : oft most things did we lack
 That most men have, as still we struggled back
 Unto the soft wind and the Grecian sea, 281
 Until this morn our keel triumphantly,
 Furrowed the green waves of the well-known bay.
 There to yon palace did I take my way,
 As one who thought his father's face to see ;
 Yet landing on the green shore warily,
 (Since times may change, and friendship come to
 nought)

To this dead man straightway my feet were
 brought,

Whose face I knew, the face of Pelias.

‘ Then still more warily thence did we pass,
 Till we met folk who told us everything, 291
 Both of the slaying of the godlike king,
 Æson, my father, and of other folk,
 And how the whole land groaned beneath the
 yoke

Of this dead man, whom sure the Gods have slain
 That all our labour might not be in vain,
 Nor we, safe passing through the deadly land,
 Lie slain in our own country at his hand.
 So have the Gods wrought, therefore am I here,
 No shield upon mine arm, no glittering spear
 In my right hand, but by my unarmed side
 This Colchian Queen, by many sorrows tried.
 Therefore, no fear of you is in my heart,
 And if ye will, henceforth will I depart, 304
 Nor take mine own ; or if it please this town
 To slay me, let them lay my dead corpse down,
 As on his tomb my father's image lies,

Like what he was before these miseries
 Fell on his head. But in no wise will I
 Take seat beneath this golden canopy, 310
 Before ye tell me, people of this land,
 Whose throne this is before the which I stand,
 Whose towered house this is mine eyes behold,
 Girt round with brazen pillars, bright with gold.'

Then, ere he ceased, the people's shouts broke in
 Upon his speech : ' Most glorious of thy kin !
 Be thou our king—be thou our king alone,
 That we may think the age of iron gone,
 And Saturn come with every peaceful thing :—
 Jason for king ! the Conqueror for king ! '

Therewith the heroes clashed their spears and
 shields, 321
 And as within the many-flowered fresh fields
 This way and that the slim-stalked flowers do
 bend,

When sweeping gusts the soft west wind doth send
 Among their hosts, so moved the people then,
 When ceased the shouting of the armed men.
 For each unto the other 'gan to speak,
 And o'er the tall men's heads some dame would
 seek

To raise her child to look upon the king. 329
 And as with smiles and laughter many a thing
 They chattered through the great square joyously,
 Each careless what his neighbour's words might
 be,

It sounded like some February mead,
 Where thick the lusted starlings creep and feed,
 And each his own song sings unto his mate,

322 many-flowered fresh fields] many-flowered fields
 323 flowers do bend] flowers bend

Chiding the fickle spring so cold and late.

But through the happy clamour of the folk,
At Jason's bidding, the great trumpet broke,
And great Echion's voice rang clear and strong,
As he cried silence ; then across the throng,
Did Jason cry : ' O people, thanked be ye, 341
That in such wise ye give yourselves to me.
And now, O friends, what more is there to say
But this ? Be glad, and feast this happy day,
Nor spend one coin of all your store for this ;
Nor shall the altars of the high Gods miss
Their due thankoffering : and She chief of all,
Who caused that this same happy time should
fall,

Shall have a tithe of all that 'longs to me. 349

' And ye, O loved companions o'er the sea,
Come to my golden house, and let us feast,
Nor let time weary us this night at least ;
O ! be so glad that this our happy day
For all times past, all times to come may pay.'

He ceased, and one more shout the people sent
Up to the heavens, as he descending went
With the fair Colchian through the joyous folk,
From whose well-ordered lane at times there
broke

Some little child, thrust forward well to see
The godlike leader of the Minyæ : 360
Or here and there forth would some young man
lean

To gaze upon the beauty of the queen
A little nearer, as they passed him by.

Then, in such guise, they went triumphantly
To all the temples of that city fair,

' 345 of all your store] of your store

And royal gifts they gave the great Gods there,
 But chiefest from the Queen of Heaven's close .
 The clouds of incense in the air uprose,
 And chiefly thither were the white lambs led,
 And there the longest, Jason bowed the head
 Well garlanded with lily flowers white. 371

But She, when all these things were done aright,
 And Jason now had turned to go away,
 In midmost of that cloudless sunny day
 Bade Iris build her many-coloured bow,
 That She her favour to the king might show.

Then still more did the royal man rejoice,
 And o'er the people, lifting up his voice,
 Cried : ' See, Thessalians, who is on my side,
 Nor fear ye now but plenty will abide 380
 In your fair land, and all folk speak of it,
 From places whence the wavering swallows fit,
 That they may live with us the sweet half
 year,

To earth where dwells the sluggish white-felled
 bear.'

So spake he, glad past words ; and for the rest
 Did Juno love him well since his great quest
 Had brought home bitter death on Pelias,
 And his love's words had brought the thing to
 pass,

That o'er that head was hanging, since the day
 When from Sidero dead he turned away, 390
 And as with Neleus down the steps he trod,
 Thought things that fitted some undying God.

Thence to his father's tomb did Jason go,
 And found the old man's body laid alow,
 Within a lone, unkingly grave, and bade

That straightway should a royal tomb be made
To lay him in, anigh the murmuring sea,
Where, celebrating their great victory,
They might do honour to his head recrowned,
And 'mid their shouts all mourning might be
drowned.

Nor would they gladden Pelias' lonely shade
By weeping o'er the slaughter he had made.

Therefrom unto his own house Jason came,
He had not entered since the night his name
Rang 'twixt the marble walls triumphantly,
And all folk set their hearts upon the sea.
So, now again, when shadows 'gan to fall
Still longer from the west, within that hall 408
Once more the heroes sat above their wine,
Once more they hearkened music nigh divine,
Once more the maidens' flower-scattering hands
Seemed better prizes than well-peopled lands.

Glorious and royal, now the deed was done,
Seemed in that hall the face of every one,
Who, 'twixt the thin plank and the bubbling
sea.

Had pulled the smooth oar-handle past his knee.
Tuneful each voice seemed as the heroes told
The marvels that their eyes did erst behold,
Unto some merchant of the goodly town,
Or some rich man who on the thymy down
Fed store of sheep, and in whose lush green mead
The heavy-uddered cows were wont to feed.

And she who all this world of joy had made,
And dared so many things all unafraid, 424
Now sat a Queen beside her crowned King.
And as his love increased with everything

401 Nor gladden the slain Pelias' lonely shade

She did or said, forgot her happy state
 In Æea of old times, ere mighty fate
 Brought Argo's side from out the clashers twain,
 Betwixt the rainbow and the briny rain. 430
 Yet in the midst of her felicity

She trembled lest another day should see
 Another fate, and other deeds for these,
 Who hailed her not the least of Goddesses.

Yet surely now, if never more again,
 Had she and all these folk forgotten pain,
 And idle words to them were Death and Fear ;
 For in the gathering evening could they hear
 The carols of the glad folk through the town,
 The song of birds within the garden drown ;
 And when the golden sun had gone away, 441
 Still little darker was the night than day
 Without the windows of the goodly hall.

But many an hour after the night did fall,
 Though outside, silence fell on man and beast,
 There still they sat, nor wearied of the feast ;
 Yea, ere they parted glimmering light had come
 From the far mountains, nigh the Colchian's
 home,
 And in the twilight birds began to wake.

But the next morn, for slaughtered Æson's
 sake 450
 The games began, with many a sacrifice,
 And, these being all accomplished, gifts of price
 The heroes took at Jason's open hands,
 And, going homewards, unto many lands
 They bore the story of their wandering.

And now is Jason mighty lord and king,
 And wedded to the fairest queen on earth,

And with no trouble now to break his mirth ;
 And, loved by all, lives happy, free from blame,
 Nor less has won the promised meed of fame.
 So, having everything he once desired 461
 Within the wild, ere yet his heart was fired
 By Juno's word, he lives an envied man,
 Holding these things that scarce another can,
 Ease, love, and fame, and youth that knows no
 dread
 Of any horrors lurking far ahead
 Across the sunny, flowered fields of life :—
 —Youth seeing no end unto the joyous strife.

And thus in happy days, and rest, and peace,
 Here ends the winning of the Golden Fleece. 470

BOOK XVII

Jason at Corinth—The wedding of Glauce—The
 death of Jason.

So ends the winning of the Golden Fleece,
 So ends the tale of that sweet rest and peace
 That unto Jason and his love befell ;
 Another story now my tongue must tell,
 And tremble in the telling. Would that I
 Had but some portion of that mastery
 That from the rose-hung lanes of woody Kent
 Through these five hundred years such songs
 have sent
 To us, who, meshed within this smoky net
 Of unrejoicing labour, love them yet. 10
 And thou, O Master !—Yea, my Master still,
 464 Holding] Having

Whatever feet have scaled Parnassus' hill,
 Since like thy measures, clear, and sweet, and
 strong,
 Thames' stream scarce fettered bore the bream
 along
 Unto the bastioned bridge, his only chain.
 O Master, pardon me, if yet in vain
 Thou art my Master, and I fail to bring
 Before men's eyes the image of the thing
 My heart is filled with : thou whose dreamy eyes
 Beheld the flush to Cressid's cheeks arise, 20
 When Troilus rode up the praising street,
 As clearly as they saw thy townsmen meet
 Those who in vineyards of Poictou withstood
 The glittering horror of the steel-topped wood.

Ten years have passed, since in the market-
 place
 The hero stood with flushed and conquering face,
 And life before him like one happy day ;
 But many an hour thereof has passed away
 In mingled trouble and felicity.
 And now at Corinth, kissed by either sea, 30
 He dwells, not governed now or governing,
 Since there his kinsman Creon is a king.

And with him still abides the Colchian,
 But little changed, since o'er the waters wan
 She gazed upon the mountains that she knew
 Still lessening as the plunging Argo flew
 Over the billows on the way to Greece.
 But in these ten sweet years of rest and peace
 Two fair man-children has she borne to him,
 Who, joyous, fair of face, and strong of limb,
 Full oft shall hear the glorious story told 41

Of Argo and the well-won Fleece of Gold,
 By some old mariner ; and oft shall go
 Where nigh the sea the wind-swept beech-trees
 grow,

And with a grey old woman tending them,
 Shall make an Æa of some beech-tree's stem,
 About whose roots there stands the water black.
 Nor of the fleece shall they have any lack,
 For in the bushes hangs much tangled wool
 From wandering sheep who seek the shadow cool ;
 And for the dragon shall there be thereby 51
 A many-coloured snake, with glazed dull eye,
 Slain by the shepherd ; so shall pass their days,
 Whom folk look soon to gather wealth and
 praise.

And 'midst these living things has Argo found
 A home here also ; on the spot of ground
 'Twixt Neptune's temple and the eastern sea,
 She looks across the waves unceasingly ;
 And as their ridges draw on toward the land,
 The wind tells stories of the kingly band. 60
 There, with the fixed and unused oars spread out
 She lies, amidst the ghosts of song and shout,
 And merry laughter, that were wont to fill
 Her well-built hollow, slowly dying still,
 Like all that glorious company of kings
 Who in her did such well-remembered things.

But as the day comes round when o'er the seas
 She darted 'twixt the blue Symplegades,
 And when again she rushed across the bar,
 With King Æetes following her afar, 70
 And when at length the heroes laid adown
 The well-worn oars at old King Æson's town,—
 When, year by year, these glorious days came
 round,

Bright with gay garments was that spot of
ground,

And the grey rocks that o'ertop Cenchreæ
Sent echoes of sweet singing o'er the sea.

For then the keel the maidens went about
Singing the songs of Orpheus, and the shout
Of rough-voiced sea-folk ended every song ; 79
And then from stem to stern they hung along
Garlands of flowers, and all the oars did twine
With garlands too, and cups of royal wine
Cast o'er her stem ; and at the stern a maid,
Clad like to Juno, on the tiller laid
Her slender fingers, while anigh the stem
Stood one with wings and many-coloured hem
About her raiment, like the messenger
Who bears the high Gods' dreadful words with
her,
And through the sea of old that stem did lead.

Lo, in such wise they honoured that great deed,
But Jason did they reverence as a God ; 91
And though his kinsman bore the ivory rod
And golden circlet, little could he do
Unless the great Thessalian willed it too.

Yet therefore Creon nowise bore him hate,
But reverencing the wise decrees of fate,
Still honoured him the more ; and therewith
thought,

Would that this man by some means might be
brought

To wed my daughter, since, when I am dead,
By none but him the people shall be led. 100
And on this thought he brooded more and more,
And 'gan to hate the Colchian very sore,
And through the place, as lightly he might do,

He spread ill tales of false things and of true,
 And unto Jason's self such words did say
 As well he thought might turn his heart away
 From faith and truth ; and as such words will
 come,

When wise men speak them, to a ready home,
 So here they did ; though soothly for his part,
 He knew it not, nor yet his restless heart. 110

But on a day it fell that as they sat
 In Creon's porch, and talked of this or that,
 The king said unto Jason : ' Brave thou art,
 But hast thou never fear within thine heart
 Of what the Gods may do for Pelias ? '

' Nay,' Jason said, ' let what will come to pass,
 His day is past, and mine is flourishing,
 But doubtless is an end to everything,
 And soon or late each man shall have his day.'

Then said the king : ' Neither did thine hand
 slay 120

The man thyself, or bring his death about ;
 Each man shall bear his own sin without doubt
 Yet do I bid thee watch and take good heed
 Of what the Colchian's treacheries may breed '

Then quickly Jason turned his head around
 And said : ' What is there dwelling above ground
 That loveth me as this one loveth me ?

O Creon ! I am honoured here as thee ;
 All do my will as if a God I were ;

Scarce can the young men see me without fear,
 The elders without tears of vain regret. 131

And, certes, had this worshipped head been set
 Upon some spike of King Æetes' house,
 But for her tender love and piteous

For me she gave up country, kin, and name,

107 words] oft 122 Each man shall] Let each man

For me she risked tormenting and the flame,
 The anger of the Gods and curse of man ;
 For me she came across the waters wan
 Through many woes, and for my sake did go
 Alone, unarmed, to my most cruel foe, ¹⁴⁰
 Whom there she slew by his own daughters'
 hands,

Making me king of all my father's lands :
 Note all these things, and tell me then to flee
 From that which threateneth her who loveth me.'

' Yea,' said the king, ' to make and to unmake
 Is her delight ; and certes for thy sake
 She did all this thou sayest, yea, and yet more.
 Seeing thee death-doomed on a foreign shore,
 With hardy heart, but helpless ; a king's son,
 But with thy thread of life well-nigh outrun ;
 Therefore, I say, she did all this for thee, ¹⁵¹
 And ever on the way to Thessaly
 She taught thee all things needful since ye were
 As void of helpful knowledge as of fear.
 All this she did, and so was more than queen
 Of thee and thine : but thou—thine age is green,
 Nor wilt thou always dwell in this fair town,
 Nor through the wild wood hunt the quarry
 down—

Bethink thee—of the world thou mayst be king,
 Holding the life and death of everything, ¹⁶⁰
 Nor will she love thee more, upon that day
 When all her part will be but to obey ;
 Nor will it then be fitting unto thee
 To have a rival in thy sovereignty
 Laid in thy bed, and sitting at thy board.'

Now somewhat Jason reddened at that word,

147 and yet more] and more

153 Bade thee do this or that, since still ye were

But said : ' O Creon, let the thing be so !
 She shall be high the while that I am low,
 And as the Gods in heaven rule over me. ¹⁶⁵
 Since they are greater, in such wise shall she,
 Who as they gave me life, has given me life,
 And glorious end to seeming hopeless strife '

Then Creon said : ' Yea, somewhat good it
 were
 If thou couldst lead that life, and have no fear.'
 Laughing he spoke ; but quickly changed his
 face,

And with knit brows he rose up from his place,
 And with his hand on Jason's shoulder, said :—
 ' O careless man, too full of hardihead !
 O thou ease-loving, little-thinking man,
 Whate'er thou doest, dread the Colchian ' ¹⁸⁰
 She will unmake thee yet, as she has made,
 And in a bloody grave shalt thou be laid.'

Then turning, to his palace went the king,
 But Jason, left alone and pondering,
 Felt in his heart a vague and gnawing fear,
 Of unknown troubles slowly drawing near,
 And, spite of words, the thing that Creon said
 Touched in his heart that still increasing dread
 And he was moved by that grave elder's face,
 For love was dying in the ten years' space.

But Creon, sitting in his chamber, thought,
 ' Surely I deem my hero may be brought
 To change his mate, for in his heart I see
 He wearies of his great felicity, ¹⁹⁴
 Like fools, for whom fair heaven is not enough,
 Who long to stumble over forests rough
 With chance of death : yet no more will I say,
 [the] that 192 deem] think 196 Who] And

But let the bright sun bring about the day.'

Now such an one for daughter Creon had
 As maketh wise men fools, and young men mad,
 Who yet in Corinth at this time was not,
 But dwelt afar upon a woody spot 202
 Anigh Cleonæ; whither oft before
 Had Jason gone for chasing of the boar
 With Creon and his folk; and on a day
 With the old king again he took his way
 To that dark wood, whereto, about the noon,
 They came, well harbingered by thrushes' tune,
 And there straight fell to hunting of the boar;
 But, either through default of woodland lore,
 Or bidden by the king, huntsmen and all 211
 The king's stout servants from the chase did fall,
 And Jason with him soon was left alone.
 And both saw that the day would soon be done,
 For 'midst the thick trees was it nigh twilight,
 Then Jason said: 'Surely our bed to-night
 Will be beneath these creaking boughs and
 black.'

'Nay,' said the king, 'surely we shall not lack
 Soft golden beds such as old men desire,
 Nor on the hearth the crackling of the fire,
 For hereby is a little house of mine 221
 Wheredwells my daughter Glauce, near the shrine
 Of round-armed Juno; there, with two or three,
 Matrons or maids, she guardeth reverently
 The altar of the Goddess.'

With that word
 Forward his jaded horse old Creon spurred,
 And Jason followed him; and when the sun
 His burning course that day had well-nigh done,
 The king and Jason came anigh the place 229

214 With that both saw that nigh the day was done,

Where stood the house upon a swarded space
 Amidst thick trees, that hedged it like a wall,
 Whose shadows now o'er half the place did fall,
 While, 'twixt their stems the low sun showed
 like fire,

And in the east the still white moon rose higher.

But midmost there a glittering roof of gold
 Slim shafts of pale blue marble did uphold,
 And under it, made by the art divine
 Of some dead man, before a well-wrought shrine,
 The Goddess stood, carved out of purest gold,
 That her fair altar thence she might behold,
 And round that temple was a little close 241
 Shut by a gilded trellis of red rose
 From off the forest green-sward, and from thence
 Carried by winds about the beech wood dense,
 The scent of lilies rose up in the air,
 And store of pea-fowl was there roosting there,
 Or moving lazily across the grass.

But from the temple did the two kings pass
 Unto a marble house that was thereby,
 Not great indeed, but builded cunningly, 250
 And set about with carven images,
 Built in a close of slim young apple-trees ;
 A marble fountain was there nigh the door,
 And there the restless water trickled o'er
 A smooth-hewn basin coloured like a shell,
 And from the wet pink lip thereof it fell
 By many a thin streak into a square pool,
 From whence it ran again, the grass to cool,
 In a small stream o'er sand, and earth, and flint,
 Edged all about with fragrant blue-flowered
 mint, 260

Or hidden by the flat-leaved quivering sedge.

But from the pool's smooth-wrought and outmost
edge

There went a marble step the fount to meet,
Well worn by many a water-drawer's feet.

And thereon now they saw a damsel stand,
Holding the basin's lip with either hand,
While at her feet a brazen ewer stood ;
But when she heard them coming from the wood,
She turned about, and, seeing men near by,
Caught up the brazen vessel hastily, 270
And swiftly ran towards the marble house ;
But Creon, in his voice imperious,
Cried : ' Hither, Glauce, am I grown so old,
That without fear thou canst no more behold
Thy father, Creon ? Nay, come near, O child,
And bid us welcome to the forest wild.'

Then straight she stopped, and setting down
the urn,
Unto her father and his guest did turn,
While o'er his saddle-bow old Creon bent,
Rejoicing in her beauty as she went ; 280
And for one moment every scheme forgat,
For raising this thing and abasing that ,
As well he might, for as in poor array
She drew towards them at that end of day,
With raiment fluttering in the evening breeze,
She seemed like Her, the crown of Goddesses,
Who, o'er the dark sea, at the sunset came
To be in heaven a joy, on earth a flame.
Blushing, she came to Creon's saddle-bow,
And kissed him, who said, smiling : ' Fearest
thou 290
Thy father, grown the oldest of old men ?
How wilt thou look upon this stranger then,
Who is no God, though such he seems to be,

But Jason, leader of the Minyæ ? '
 Somewhat she started at the glorious name,
 And o'er her face deeper the red flush came,
 As she, with upraised face and shamefast eyes,
 Said : ' Welcome, winner of the guarded prize !
 Good hap it is indeed that thou art come
 Unto my little-peopled woodland home. 300
 Come then, my lords, to what awaits you here ;
 Not Mæonean wine or dainty cheer
 Your lips shall taste, but of fair simple flowers,
 Plucked at the edges of the beechen bowers,
 Your drink shall savour, and your meat shall be
 Red-coated squirrels from the beechen tree.'

Then fain to hide her eyes and blushing face,
 She turned from them, and at a gentle pace
 Unto the pillared porch she led the twain. 309
 There they, alighting, the dark house did gain,
 And there they ate and drank, making such cheer
 As fasting men will do ; and still anear
 Was Glauce to them, telling every maid
 How such and such a thing should be arrayed ;
 And ever the Thessalian's eager eyes
 Did follow her, and to his heart did rise
 Vague feelings of a new-found happiness.

But now as the round moon was growing less,
 And waxing brighter, and of fitting food 319
 The kings had eaten as they thought it good,
 Then Creon said : ' O daughter, rise and take
 This full cup to the hero for my sake,
 And bid him drink thereof, and tell thee all
 That unto him at Æa did befall,
 And what fate did as still he journeyed home.'

302 Not spiced Mæotic wine or dainty cheer

304 *This line was not in the first edition*

321 daughter, rise and] daughter, straightly

Then unto Jason did the maiden come,
 Bearing the cup, and when he saw her thus,
 The lapse of time seemed strange and piteous ;
 For he bethought him of that other tide,
 When certain-seeming death he did abide 330
 In King Æetes' hall ; and when she drew
 Anigh unto him, back the past years flew,
 And he became that man entrapped again,
 And newly felt, as then, that joyous pain,
 And in his hand as then the cup he took,
 With the warm fingers, and as then her look
 Sent fire throughout his veins , yea, and as then
 He had no heed of any Gods or men

Therewith her musical sweet voice he heard,
 Speaking again the king her father's word :—
 ' O Jason, if it please thee, tell me all 341
 That unto thee at ÆEa did befall,
 And what thou sawedst as thou journeydst home,
 And how it happed thee to thy land to come.'

But ever as she spake she gazed at him,
 And with new thoughts her simple eyes did swim,
 Thinking her happy that this man had wed ;
 And therewithal she turned from pale to red,
 And red to pale. Then said he : 'Thou shalt
 know,

O fair king's daughter, all I have to show.' .
 And so the story of the Fleece began, 351
 And how fair Argo crossed the water wan ;
 While from his glittering eyes, deep sunk with eld,
 The wily king those beauteous folk beheld,
 As still from Jason's lips poured forth the tale,
 And she sat listening, whiles with cheeks grown
 pale

And parted lips, and whiles with downcast eyes

And blushing for the thoughts that would arise
 Uncalled for ; and thus passed that eve away
 Till time of rest came. Then until the day,
 In his fair silken bed did Jason dream 361
 Of Argo struggling with the unknown stream,
 And all the wonders of their long-past quest,
 And well-known faces long time laid to rest.

But when the night was past, and the great sun
 Another day for all things had begun,
 The kings, arising, unto Corinth rode.
 But ere they left the woodland fair abode,
 Unto the Goddess they sacrifice,
 And on her altars the wood-land wise 370
 As huntsmen their offerings did they lay.
 With them they came on that dawn of day,
 Upon the hearth of the ancient king,
 Unto the royal Goddess ministring.
 But when she turned once more unto the town,
 The half-quenched censer did she lay adown.
 And holding still the fresh-plucked flower-
 wreath,
 Bade them farewell

Then by thick wood and heath
 They rode, and on their journey Jason said
 Few words and wandering ; for still that maid
 Did he behold before his waking eyes, 381
 And with the oft-recurring memories
 Of days and things a long time passed away
 Her image mixed, and words that she did say.

But when upon the threshold of his house
 He met Medea, who, with amorous
 And humble words, spoke to him greetings kind,
 He felt as he whose eyes the fire doth blind,
 That presently about his limbs shall twine,

And in her face and calm grey eyes divine 390
 He read his own destruction ; none the less
 In his false heart fair Glauce's loveliness
 Seemed that which he had loved his whole life
 long,

And little did he feel his old love's wrong.

Alas for truth ! each day, yea, hour by hour,
 He longed once more to see the beechen bower,
 And her who dwelt thereby. Alas, alas !
 Oft from his lips the hated words would pass :—

' O wavering traitors, still unsatisfied !

O false betrayer of the ~~w~~ve so tried ! 400

Fool ! to cast off the be~~g~~oty that thou knowst,
 Clear-seeing wisdom, bettswe~~h~~an a host
 Against thy foes, and truth~~r~~ fad constancy
 Thou wilt not know again well n~~e~~r shall be ! '

So oft he spoke words that ~~v~~ab~~s~~ words indeed,
 And had no sting, nor would ~~h~~ournanged heart
 heed lan

The very bitterest of them all, ~~as~~ he
 Thought of his woodland fair divinity,
 And of her upturned face, so wondering
 At this or that oft-told unheeded thing. 410

Yet whiles, indeed, old memories had some
 power

Over his heart, in such an awful hour
 As that, when darksome night is well-nigh done,
 And earth is waiting silent for the sun ;
 Then would he turn about his mate to see,
 From lips half open, breathing peacefully,
 And open, listless, the fair fingers laid,
 That unto him had brought such mighty aid.
 Then, groaning, from her would he turn away,
 And wish he might not see another day, 420
 For certainly his wretched soul he knew,

And of the cruel God his heart that drew.
 But when the bright day had come round again,
 With noise of men, came foolish thoughts and
 vain,

And, feeding fond desire, would he burn
 Unto Cleonæ his swift steps to turn. 426

Nor to these matters was the Colchian blind,
 And though as yet his speech to her was kind,
 Good heed she took of all his moody ways,
 And how he loved her not as in past days ;
 And how he shrunk from her, yet knew it not,
 She noted, and the stammering words and hot,
 Wherewith, as she grew kinder, still he strove
 To hide from her the changing of his love.

Long time she tried to shut her eyes to this,
 Striving to save that fair abode of bliss ;
 But so it might not be ; and day by day
 She saw the happy time fade fast away ;
 And as she fell from out that happiness,
 Again she grew to be the sorceress, 440
 Worker of fearful things, as once she was,
 When what my tale has told she brought to pass.

Nor yet believed—that to all earthly men,
 In spite of right and wrong, and love and hate,
 One day shall come the turn of luckless fate.
 Alas ! then I believed it not, when I
 Saw Argo's painted prow triumphantly
 Cleave the grey seas, and knew that I it was,
 My very self, who brought those things to pass,
 And lit those eyes unseen. How could I know
 Unto what cruel folly men will grow ? ' 460

She wept therewith—and once more on that
 night

She stole abroad about the mirk midnight,
 Once more upon a wood's edge, from her feet
 She stripped her shoes and bared her shoulder
 sweet.

Once more that night over the lingering fire
 She hung with sick heart famished of desire.
 Once more she turned back when her work was
 done ;

Once more she fled the coming of the sun ;
 Once more she reached her dusky, glimmering
 room ; 469

Once more she lighted up the dying gloom ;
 Once more she lay adown, and in sad sleep
 Her weary body and sick heart did steep.
 Alas ! no more did tender Love come down
 And smoothe her troubled face of fear and frown ;
 No more with hope half-opened lips did smile.

Not long she slept, but in a little while,
 Sighing, she rose, when now the sun was high,
 And, going to her wallet wearily,
 Took forth a phial thence, which she unstopped
 And a small dribblet therefrom slowly dropped
 Upon a shred of linen, which straightway 481

In the sun's gleaming pathway did she lay ;
 But when across it the first sunbeam came,
 Therefrom there burst a colourless bright flame,
 Which still burnt on when every shred was gone
 Of that which seemed to feed the flame alone ;
 Nor burnt it less for water, that she threw
 Across it and across. Thereon she drew
 A linen tunic from a brazen chest,
 Wherein lay hid the fairest and the best 490
 Of all her raiment ; this she held, and said :—
 ' Jason, thy love is fair by likelihead,
 Pity it were to hide her over-much,
 And when this garment her fair limbs shall touch,
 So will it hide them as the waters green
 Hid Citheræa, when she first was seen.'

Soothly she spoke, because the web was fair
 And thin, and delicate beyond compare,
 And had been woven in no common loom,
 For she herself within her fair-hung room 500
 Had set the warp and watched the fine weft glide
 Up from the roller, while from side to side,
 Scarce seen, the shuttle flew from fingers thin
 Of a dark Indian maid, whom gold did win
 From some Phœnician, that loved nought but
 gold.

But sighing now the raiment to behold,
 She poured into a well-wrought bowl of brass
 The thing that in the phial hidden was,
 And therein, fold by fold, the linen laid, 509
 Then for a little while her hands she stayed,
 Till it had drunk the moisture thoroughly ;
 Whereon she took it forth and laid it by,
 Far from the sunlight, on her royal bed,
 Saying : ' O thou who hast the hardihead,
 Whoe'er thou art, to take from me mine own,

It had been better for thee that of stone
Thy limbs were wrought, nor made to suffer pain,
If this morn's deed has not been quite in vain.'

So saying, did she mutter moodily, 519
Watching the spread-out linen slowly dry ;
At last she took it and within a bright
Fair silver casket hid it from the sight.

This done, about the noble house she went,
And bitterly full oft her eyes she bent
On man and maid, and things grown old and dear,
'Midst hope of rest, no longer hoped for there.

And, meantime, Jason, by the wily king
Still watched, had little joy in anything, 523
For while with fierce desire his heart still burned,
Yet now again for rest and peace he yearned,
Nor praise of other men yet counted nought,
And somewhat of the coming days he thought,
And helpless eld with many memories
Beset, and pictures of reproachful eyes ;
Yet thinking of the chain of days and nights
Stretched out all barren of once-hoped delights
A sorry thing life seemed to him to be,
And one path only from that misery
Seemed open to him—where the fair girl stood,
Within the shadow of the beechen wood. 540

But while he wavered thus 'twixt love and fear,
And something of the old time grown too dear
To cast off lightly, Creon noted all,
And surely now had hope that should befall
He long had wished for, and in such wise wrought
That all unto an ending soon be brought.

Therefore **it** happed that on a July morn,
Jason at last, by many troubles torn,

516 It had been good for thee that of smooth stone

Mounted his horse, and toward Cleonæ turned.
 But as with pale face, and a heart that burned
 To end all things in sweet love at the last, 551
 He by the palace of King Creon passed ;
 There Creon stood before the door, and said :—
 ‘ Where goest thou, O Jason ? By my head,
 Wilt thou not sit at our high feast to-day ?
 What do’st thou then, upon the stony way
 That leads to Argolis ? ’

‘ O King,’ said he,
 ‘ I am not meet for your solemnity,
 Because the Gods to-day have made me sad ;
 Nor knew I yet what feast here should be had,
 But thought to-day to see my arrows fly 561
 Within the green glades of the woods hereby.’

‘ Nay,’ said the king ; ‘ full surely many a day
 Of summer will there be to play this play,
 But on this day to Citheræa’s house
 Folk go, both maids and young men amorous ;
 Yea, elders like to me will hold this feast,
 Who in their foolish hearts can mourn at least
 For days and things that never come again.
 Yet, for myself, I shall not feast in vain, 570
 For on this day my daughter comes to me,
 That nigh Cleonæ erewhile thou didst see,
 And she too goes with flower-bearing hands
 To kiss the foot that on the tortoise stands.’

So saying, did his ancient wily eyes
 Behold the blood to Jason’s brow arise,
 And inwardly he laughed ; but Jason said :—
 ‘ Yea, then, O King, to chase my drearihead,
 This were a fair sight for mine eyes to see, 579
 And since thou wilt, I will go with thee.’

Then lighting from his horse, beside the king
 He stood, and talked of this or that light thing,

And saw meanwhile full*many a broad-wheeled
wain,

Filled with fair flowers plucked from the un-
shorn plain,

Go toward the temple of the Cyprian queen,
And youths and maidens, wreathed about with
green,

Pass singing carols through the listening street.

At last the king said : ' Come, and let us meet
This joyous band within the very fane.' 589

So forth they went, and soon the place did gain,

Where the fair temple of the Goddess rose

From 'midst a grassy apple-planted close.

But each side of the door a maid there stood,

Clad in thin silken raiment red as blood,

Who had by her a gilded basket light,

Filled full of flowers woven for delight,

Wherefrom unto the passing kings they gave

Wreaths bound with gold, that somewhat they
might have

To offer to the dread divinity,

Whose image, wrought of silver cunningly,

Stood 'neath a canopy of gleaming gold 601

Midmost the place, where damsels fair did hold

Baskets of flowers, or swung rich censers high ;

Then to the precious shrine they drew anigh

And forth stood Creon, and the fragrant wreath

Laid on the altar, and beneath his breath

Some prayer he muttered ; and next Jason laid

His gift by Creon's, but of much afraid,

And hoping much, he made not any prayer

Unto the Goddess ; then amid the fair 610

Slim pillars did he stand beside the king,

584 flowers plucked from] flowers from

603 swung rich censers] swung censers

Confused as in a dream, and wondering
 How all would end. But as they waited thus,
 Within that fragrant place and amorous,
 Languid grew Jason with the roses' scent
 And with the incense-cloud that ever went
 Unto the half-seen golden roof above,
 Amongst whose glimmer'g the grey-winged dove
 Hung crooning o'er his wrongs; moreover there
 The temple-damsels passed them, shy and fair,
 With white limbs shining through their thin
 attire, - 621

And amorous eyes, the hearts of men to fire,
 Beneath their heavy crowns of roses red,
 And veiled sweet voices through the place did
 shed

Strange fitful music, telling more than words,
 Confused by twitter of the restless birds
 Within the temple-eaves, and by the doves,
 Who 'mid the pillars murmured of their loves.

But when the pleasure of that temple fair
 Had sunk into his soul, upon the air 630
 Was borne the sound of flutes from folk outside,
 And soon the greatest doors were opened wide,
 And all the rout of worshippers poured in,
 Clad in fair raiment, summer-like and thin,
 And holding wreaths, part twined of fragrant
 flowers—

The children of the soft, sweet April showers—
 And part of blossoms wrought in ruddy gold.
 Now back the incense from the altar rolled
 At their incoming, driven by the wind,
 And round the pillars of the place it twined,
 Enwrapping Jason, so that faint and dim 641
 The fair show of the maidens was to him,

As each upon the altar laid adown
 The blossoms mingled with the golden crown,
 And prayed her prayer, then passed behind the
 shrine.

At last from 'midst that cloud did Venus shine
 Before the eyes of the Thessalian,
 Who, with fixed eyes, and lips grown thin and
 wan,

Stared at the image, little though he saw
 But at her feet a sweet face, grave with awe,
 Just bending over toward the silver feet, 651
 Which Glauce with a timid kiss did greet,
 And this being done, drew backward murmuring
 Her prayer to Venus : ' Goddess, a small thing
 Before this altar do I ask of thee,
 That I my hero and my love may see,
 That I '—but therewithal her face she raised,
 And met his hungry eyes that on her gazed,
 And stopped all trembling, letting fall adown
 The hand that held the gold-enwoven crown.

Yet little anger Venus had therefore, 661
 But rather smiled to see her learn her lore
 Within her house upon her festal day.

But now upon the altar did she lay
 Her offering, and yet she finished not
 Her prayer begun, though in her poor heart, hot
 With thoughts of love, full many a prayer she
 prayed.

And now was all that pageant well arrayed
 To pass about the temple, and her place
 Did Glauce take with flushed and eager face ;
 But on her finger did she loose a ring, 671
 Which that same day the wise Corinthian king
 Had given her, therewith she went along,

Murmuring faint words amidst her fellows' song.

Then past the kings the long procession swept,
And somewhat from the pillars Jason stepped,
Seeking a sign from that desired face ;
And when the damsels at a gentle pace
Went by him, and for fear of him and awe
Shrunk back, and with their slender hands did
draw

680

Closer about them the thin fragrant weed ;
Still nought of all their beauty did he heed,
But as the amorous army passed him by
Into sweet Glauce's eyes appealingly
Hegazed, who, trembling likesome snow-trapped
dove,

From her soft eyes sent forth one look of love,
Then dropped the lids, as, blind with love and
shame,

Unto the place where stood the kings she came.
And there her hand that down beside her hung
She raised a little, and her faltering tongue
Just framed the words : ' O love, for thee, for
thee ! '

691

And with that word she trembled piteously,
In terror at the sound of her own voice.
And much did wily Creon then rejoice,
Looking askance, and feigning to see nought,
When he beheld those hands together brought.

But Jason, when those fingers touched his own,
Forgot all joys that he had ever known ;
And when her hand left his hand with the ring,
Still in the palm, like some lost, stricken thing

678 when] as

683 *This line was not in the first edition.*

684 Into sweet Glauce's] But into Glauce's

685 He] Still

He stood and stared, as from his eyes she passed.
 And from that hour all fear away was cast, 702
 All memory of the past time, all regret
 For days that did those changed days beget
 And therewithal adown the wind he flung
 The love whereon his yearning heart once hung.

Ah! let me turn the page, nor chronicle
 In many words the death of faith, or tell
 Of meetings by the newly-risen moon,
 Of passionate silence 'midst the brown birds'
 tune, 710
 Of wild tears wept within the noontide shade,
 Of wild vows spoken, that of old were made,
 For other ears, when, amidst other flowers,
 He wandered through the love-begetting hours.
 Suffice it, that unhappy was each day
 Which without speech from Glauce passed away,
 And troublous dreams would visit him at night,
 When day had passed all barren of her sight.
 And at the last, that Creon, the old king, 719
 Being prayed with gifts, and joyful of the thing,
 Had given a day when these twain should be wed.

Meanwhile, the once-loved sharer of his bed
 Knew all at last, and fierce tormenting fire
 Consumed her as the dreadful day drew nigher,
 And much from other lips than his she heard,
 Till, on a day, this dreadful, blighting word,
 Her eyes beheld within a fair scroll writ,
 And 'twixt her closed teeth still she muttered it :
 'Depart in peace ! and take great heaps of
 gold,
 For nevermore thy body will I fold 730
 Within these arms. Let Gods wed Goddesses

And sea-folk wed the women of the seas,
 And men wed women ; but thee, who can wed
 And dwell with thee without consuming dread,
 O wise kin of the dreadful sorceress !
 And yet, perchance thy beauty still may bless
 Some man to whom the world seems small and
 poor,

737

And who already stands beside his door,
 Armed for the conquest of all earthly things.
 ' Lo, such an one, the vanquisher of kings,
 And equal to the Gods should be thy mate.
 But me, who for a peaceful end but wait,
 Desiring nought but love—canst thou love me ?
 Or can I give my whole heart up to thee ?

' I hear thee talk of old days thou didst know—
 Are they not gone ?—wilt thou not let them go,
 Nor to their shadows still cling desperately,
 Longing for things that never more can be ?

' What ! wilt thou blame me still that the times
 change ?

749

Once through the oak-wood happy did I range,
 And thought no ill ; but then came over me
 Madness, I know not why, and o'er the sea
 I needs must go in strife to win me fame,
 And certes won it, and my envied name
 Was 'borne with shouts about the towns of
 Greece.

' All that has vanished now, and my old
 peace,
 Through lapse of changing years, has come to me.
 Once more I seem the woodland paths to see,
 Tunes of old songs are ringing in mine ears,
 Heard long ago in that place free from fears,
 Where no one wept above his fellow dead, 761
 And looked at death himself with little dread.

The times are changed, with them is changed
my heart,

Nor in my life canst thou have any part,
Nor can I live in joy and peace with thee,
Nor yet, for all thy words, canst thou love me.

Yet, is the world so narrow for us twain
That all our life henceforth must be but vain ?
Nay, for departing shalt thou be a queen 769
Of some great world, fairer than I have seen,
And wheresoe'er thou goest shalt thou fare
As one for whom the Gods have utmost care.'

Yea, she knew all, yet when these words she
read,
She felt as though upon her bowed-down head
Had fallen a misery not known before,
And all seemed light that erst her crushed heart
bore,
For she was wrapped in uttermost despair,
And motionless within the chamber fair
She stood, as one struck dead and past all
thought.

But as she stood, a sound to her was brought
Of children's voices, and she 'gan to wail 781
With tearless eyes, and, from writhed lips and
pale,

Faint words of woe she muttered, meaningless,
But such as such lips utter none the less.
Then all at once thoughts of some dreadful thing
Back to her mind some memory seemed to bring,
As she beheld the casket gleaming fair,
Wherein was laid that she was wont to wear,
That in the philtre lay that other morn,
And therewithal unto her heart was borne
The image of two lovers, side by side. 791

Then with a groan the fingers that did hide
 Her tortured face slowly she drew away,
 And going up to where her tablets lay,
 Fit for the white hands of the Goddesses,
 Therein she wrote such piteous words as these.

' Would God that Argo's brazen-banded mast
 'Twixt the blue clashing rocks had never passed
 Unto the Colchian land ! Or would that I
 Had had such happy fortune as to die 800
 Then, when I saw thee standing by the Fleece,
 Safe on the long-desired shore of Greece !
 Alas, O Jason ! for thy cruel praise '
 Alas, for all the kindness of past days !
 That to thy heart seems but a story told
 Which happed to other folk in times of old.
 But unto me, indeed, its memory
 Was bliss in happy hours, and now shall be
 Such misery as never tongue can tell.

' Jason, I heed thy cruel message well, 810
 Nor will I stay to vex thee, nor will stay
 Until thy slaves thrust me thy love away.
 Be happy ! think that I have never been—
 Forget these eyes, that none the less have seen
 Thy hands take life at my hands, and thy heart
 O'erflow in tears, when needs was we should part
 But for a little ; though, upon the day
 When I for evermore must go away, .
 I think, indeed, thou wilt not weep for this ;
 Yea, if thou weepest then, some honied kiss
 From other lips shall make thy grey eyes wet,
 Betwixt the words that bid thee to forget
 Thou ever hast loved aught but her alone.

' Yet of all times mayst thou remember one,
 The second time that ever thou and I 825

Had met alone together—mournfully
 The soft wind murmured on that happy night,
 The round moon, growing low, was large and
 bright,

As on my father's marble house it gleamed,
 While from the fane a baneful light outstreamed,
 Lighting the horror of that prodigy, 831

The only fence betwixt whose wrath and thee
 Was this poor body. Ah ! thou knowest then
 How thou beheldest the shadows of thy men
 Steal silently towards Argo's painted head.
 Thou knowest yet the whispered words I said
 Upon that night—thou never canst forget
 That happy night of all nights. Ah ! and yet
 Why make I these long words, that thou the
 more 839

Mayst hate me, who already hat'st me sore,
 Since 'midst thy pleasure I am grown a pain.

' Be happy ! for thou shalt not hear again
 My voice, and with one word this scroll is done—
 Jason, I love thee, yea, love thee alone—
 God help me, therefore !—and would God that I
 Such as thou sayst I am, were verily,
 Then what a sea of troubles shouldst thou feel
 Rise up against thy life, how shouldst thou steel
 Thy heart to bear all, failing at the last,
 Then wouldst thou raisethine head, o'erwhelmed,
 downcast, 850

And round about once more shouldst look for
 me,

Who led thee o'er strange land and unknown sea.

' And not in vain, O dearest ! not in vain !
 Would I not come and weep at all thy pain,
 That I myself had wrought ? would I not raise
 Thy burdened head with hopes of happy days ?

Would I not draw thee forth from all thy
 woe ? 857

And fearless by thy side would I not go,
 As once I went, through many unknown lands
 When I had saved thee from my father's hands?

'All would I do, that I have done erewhile,
 To have thy love once more, and feel thy smile,
 As freed from snow about the first spring days
 The meadows feel the young sun's fickle rays.

'But I am weak, and past all, nor will I
 Pray any more for kindly memory ;
 Yet shalt thou have one last gift more from me,
 To give thy new love, since men say that she
 Is fairer than all things man can behold.

'Within this casket lies in many a fold 870
 Raiment that my forgotten limbs did press,
 When thou wert wont to praise their loveliness.
 Fear not to take it from the sorceress' hands,
 Though certainly with balms from many lands
 Is it made fragrant, wondrous with a charm
 To guard the wearer's body from all harm.

'Upon the morn that she shall make thee glad,
 With this fair tunic let her limbs be clad,
 But see that no sun falls upon its folds 879
 Until her hand the king, her father, holds,
 To greet thine eyes : then, when in godlike light
 She shines, with all her beauty grown so bright,
 That eyes of men can scarcely gaze thereon—
 Then, when thy new desire at last is won—
 Then, wilt thou not a little think of me,
 Who saved thy life for this felicity ? '

She ceased, and moaning to herself she said :—
 'Ah ! when will all be ended ? If the dead
 Have unto them some little memory left

Of things that while they lived Fate from them
reft, 890

Ere life itself was reft from them at last,
Yet would to God these days at least were past,
And all be done that here must needs be done !

' Ah ! shall I, living underneath the sun,
I wonder, wish for anything again,
Or ever know what pleasure means, and pain ? —
—And for these deeds I do ; and thou the first,
O woman, whose young beauty has so cursed
My hapless life, at least I save thee this—
The slow descent to misery from bliss, 900
With bitter torment growing day by day,
And faint hope lessening till it fades away
Into dull waiting for the certain blow.
But thou, who nought of coming fate dost know,
One overwhelming fear, one agony,
And in a little minute shalt thou be
Wherethou wouldst be in threescore years at most,
And surely but a poor gift thou hast lost.
The new-made slave, the toiler on the sea,
The once rich fallen into poverty, 910
In one hour knows more grief than thou canst
know ;

And many an one there is who fain would go
And try their fortune in the unknown life
If they could win some ending to this strife,
Unlooked-for, sudden, as thine end shall be.
Kindly I deal with thee, mine enemy ;
~~Since swift forgetfulness to thee I send.~~
But thou shalt die—his eyes shall see thine end—
Ah ! if thy death alone could end it all !

' But ye—shall I behold you when leaves fall,
In some sad evening of the autumn-tide ?

Or shall I have you sitting by my side 922
 Amidst the feast, so that folk stare and say,
 "Sure the grey wolf has seen the queen to-day."
 What ! when I kneel in temples of the Gods,
 Must I bethink me of the upturned sods,
 And hear a voice say : "Mother, wilt thou come
 And see us resting in our new-made home,
 Since thou wert used to make us lie full soft.
 Smoothing our pillows many a time and oft ?
 O mother, now no dainty food we need, 931
 Whereof thou once wert wont to have such
 heed.

O mother, now we need no gown of gold,
 Nor in the winter time do we grow cold ;
 Thy hands would bathe us when we were thine
 own,
 Now doth the rain wash every shining bone.
 No pedagogue we need, for surely heaven
 Lies spread above us, with the planets seven,
 To teach us all its lore."

Ah ! day by day

Would I have hearkened all the folk would
 say. 940

Ah ! in the sweet beginning of your days
 Would I have garnered every word of praise.
 "What fearless backers of the untamed steed,"
 "What matchless spears, what loyal friends at
 need,"
 "What noble hearts, how bountiful and free,"
 "How like their father on the troublous sea !"
 'O sons, with what sweet counsels and what
 tears

Would I have hearkened to the hopes and fears
 Of your first loves : what rapture had it been
 932 Whereof of old thou usedst to have such heed.

Your dear returning footsteps to have seen
 Amidst the happy warriors of the land ; 951
 But now—but now—this is a little hand
 Too often kissed since love did first begin
 To win such curses as it yet shall win,
 When after all bad deeds there comes a worse ;
 Praise to the Gods ! ye know not how to curse.

‘ But when in some dim land we meet again
 Will ye remember all the loss and pain ?
 Will ye the form of children keep for aye
 With thoughts of men ? and “ Mother,” will ye
 say, 960
 “ Why didst thou slay us ere we came to know
 That men die ? hadst thou waited until now,
 An easy thing it had been then to die,
 For in the thought of immortality
 Do children play about the flowery meads,
 And win their heaven with a crown of weeds.”

‘ O children ! that I would have died to save,
 How fair a life of pleasure might ye have,
 But for your mother :—nay, for thee, for thee,
 For thee who might’st have lived so happily ;
 For thee, O traitor ! who didst bring them here
 Into this cruel world, this lovely bier 972
 Of youth and love, and joy and happiness,
 That unforeseeing happy fools still bless.’

Amid these wild words had the evening come
 Of the last day in that once happy home ;
 So, rising, did she take the casket-fair,
 And gave it to a faithful slave to bear,
 With all those wailing words that she had writ
 To Jason, her love once ; then did she sit 980
 Within that chamber, with her heavy head
 Laid on her arms, and scarce more than the dead

She moved, for many hours, until at last
 A stupor over her some kind God cast,
 So that she slept, and had forgetfulness
 A little while from fury and distress.

But Jason, when he read that bitter word
 Was sore ashamed, and in his ears he heard
 Words that men durst not speak before his face ;
 Therewith, for very shame, that silver case
 And what it held he sent unto his bride, 991
 And therewithal this word : ' Whatso betide,
 Let not the sun shine on it till the hour
 When thou hast left for aye thy maiden bower,
 And with the king thou standest in the hall,
 Then unto thee shall all good things befall.'

So to his rest he went, but, sooth to say,
 He slept but little till the dawn of day, 998
 So troubled was his mind with many a thing,
 And in his ears long-spoken words did ring!
 ' Good speed, O traitor ! who shall think to wed
 Soft limbs and white, and find thy royal bed
 Dripping with blood and burning up with fire.'

So there, 'twixt fear and shame and strong
 desire,
 Sleepless he lay until the day began—
 The conqueror, the king, the envied man.

But on the chamber where sweet Glauce lay,
 Fair broke the dawning of that dreadful day,
 And fairer from her bed did she arise, 1009
 And looking down with shamefast timid eyes,
 Beheld the bosom that no man had seen,
 And round limbs worthy of the Sea-born Queen.
 With that she murmured words of joy and love,
 No louder than the grey, pink-footed dove,

When at the dawn he first begins his tale,
Not knowing if he means a song or wail.

Then soon her maidens came, and every rite
That was the due of that slim body white,
They wrought with careful hands; and last
they took

Medea's gift, and all the folds outshook, 1020
And in a cool room looking toward the north,
They clad the queen therewith, nor brought her
forth

Till over all a gold cloak they had laid.
Then to King Creon did they bring the maid,
Rejoicing in the greatness of her love,
Which well she thought no lapse of time could
move,

And on the daïs of the royal hall
They waited till the hour should befall
When Jason and his friends would 'bear her
thence

With gentle rape and tender violence, 1030
As then the manner was, and the old king
Sat there beside her, glad at every thing.

Meanwhile the people thronged in every way,
Clad in gay weed, rejoicing for that day,
Since that their lords had bidden them rejoice,
And in the streets was many a jocund voice,
That carolled to the honour of the twain
Who on that day such blissful life should gain.

But Jason set out from his pillared house,
Clad in rich raiment, fair and amorous, 1040
Forgetful of the troubles of the night,
Nor thinking more of that impending blight,
Nor those ill words the harpies spoke of old,
As with his fellows, glittering with gold,
Towards Creon's palace did he take his way,

To meet the bride that he should wed that day.

But in the hall the pillars one by one
Had barred the pathway of the travelling sun,
As toward the west he turned, and now at last
Upon the dais were his hot rays cast, 1050
As they within heard the glad minstrelsy
Of Jason to his loved one drawing nigh.

Then Creon took fair Glauce by the hand,
And round about her did her damsels stand,
Making a ring 'gainst that sweet violence,
That soon should bear their lovely mistress
thence.

While Glauce, trembling with her shamefast joy,
With the gold mantle's clasp began to toy,
Eager to cast that covering off, and feel
The hero's mighty arms about her steal. 1060

Meanwhile, her lover through the court had
passed,
And at the open door he stood at last,
Amidst his friends, and looking thence, he saw
The white arms of the damsels round her draw
A wall soon to be broken ; but her face
Over their flower-crowned heads made glad the
place :

Giddy with joy one moment did he gaze
And saw his love her slender fingers raise
Unto the mantle's clasp—the next the hall
Was filled with darting flames from wall to wall,
And bitter screams rang out, as here and there,
Scorched, and with outspread arms, the damsels
fair 1072

Rushed through the hall ; but swiftly Jason ran,
Grown in one moment like an old worn man,
Up to the dais, whence one bitter cry

He heard, of one in utmost agony,
 Calling upon his once so helpful name ;
 But when unto the fiery place he came,
 Nought saw he but the flickering tongues of fire
 That up the wall were climbing high and higher ;
 And on the floor a heap of ashes white, 1081
 The remnant of his once beloved delight,
 For whom his ancient love he cast away,
 And of her sire who brought about that day.

Then he began to know what he had done,
 And madly through the palace did he run,
 Calling on Glauce, mingling with her name
 The name of her that brought him unto fame,
 Colchian Medea, who, for her reward,
 Had lonely life made terrible and hard, 1090
 By love cast back, within her heart to grow
 To madness and the vengeance wrought out now ;
 But as about the burning place he ran,
 Full many a maid he met and pale-faced man,
 Wild with their terror, knowing not what end
 That which their eyes had seen might yet por-
 tend :

But these shrunk backward from his brandished
 sword,
 And open shouting mouth, and frenzied word,
 As still from chamber unto chamber fair
 He rushed, scarce knowing what he sought for
 there, 1100
 Nor where he went, till his unresting feet
 Had borne him out at last into the street,
 Where armed and unarmed people stood to gaze
 On Creon's palace that began to blaze
 From every window out into the air,
 With strange light making pale that noontide
 fair.

But they, bewildered sore, and timorous,
 Gazed helplessly upon the burning house,
 And dreaded yet some hidden enemy,
 Thinking indeed a dreadful God to see, 1110
 Bearing a fresh destruction in his hand.

But now, when Jason with his glittering brand
 Broke in upon them from the growing fire,
 With wild pale face, and half-burnt rich attire,
 They fell back shuddering as his face they knew.
 Changed though it was, and soon a murmur
 grew :—

‘ Death to the sorceress, the Colchian ! ’ 1
 But he, unheeding still, from ’midst them ran,
 Until unto his own fair house he came, 1119
 Where gazed his folk upon the far-off flame,
 And muttered low for fear and woefulness.

Then he knew not his own, but none the less,
 Into the court he passed, and his bright sword
 Cast down and said : ‘ What feeble, timid lord
 Hides here when all the world is on a blaze,
 And laughing, from their heaven the high Gods
 gaze

At foolish men shut in the burning place ? ’
 With that he turned about his haggard face,
 And stared upon his own fair-sculptured frieze,
 Carved into likeness of the tumbling seas,
 And Argo, and the heroes he had led, 1131
 And fair Medea. Then he cried, and said :—
 ‘ Lo, how the Gods are mocking me with this,
 And show me pictures of my vanished bliss,
 As though on earth I were, and not in hell ;
 And images of things I know full well
 Have set about me. Can I die again,
 And in some lower hell forget the pain
 My life is passed in now ? ’

And with that word
 He cast his eyes upon his glittering sword,
 And caught it up and set it to his breast,
 And in one moment had he been at rest
 From all his troubles, when a woman old,
 His nurse in past times, did the deed behold,
 And ran and caught the hero's mighty hand,
 And hanging round about him did she stand,
 And cried : ' Ah, Jason ! ah, my lord, let be !
 For who can give another life to thee ?
 And though to-day the very sun looks black,
 And wholesome air the whole world seems to
 lack,

1150

Yet shalt thou yet have wealth of happy days,
 And well fulfilled desires, and all men's praise ;
 Unless the Gods have quite forgotten thee.
 O Jason ! O my child ! come now with me,
 That I may give thee sweet forgetfulness
 A little while of sorrow and distress.'

Then with the crone did Jason go along,
 And let her thin hand hold his fingers strong,
 As though a child he were in that old day,
 Ere in the centaur's woodland cave he lay.
 But through the house unto a distant room,
 Dark-hung, she brought him, where, amidst the
 gloom,

1162

Speechless he lay, when she had made him drink
 Some potion pressed from herbs plucked by the
 brink

Of scarce-known lakes of Pontus ; then she said,
 As she beheld at last his weary head
 Sink on the pillow : ' Jason, rest thee now,
 And may some kind God smooth thy wrinkled
 brow.

1168

Behold to-morrow comes, and thou art young,

Nor on one string are all life's jewels strung ;
 Thou shalt be great, and many a land shalt save,
 And of thy coming life more joy shalt have
 Than thou hast thought of yet.'

He heard her words,
 But as the far-off murmur of the birds
 The townsman hears ere yet the morn is late,
 While streets are void and shut is every gate ;
 But still they soothed him, and he fell asleep,
 While at his feet good watch the crone did keep.

But what a waking unto him shall be !
 And what a load of shameful misery 1180
 His life shall bear ! His old love cast away,
 His new love dead upon that fearful day,
 Childless, dishonoured, must his days go by.
 For in another chamber did there lie
 Two little helpless bodies side by side,
 Smiling as though in sweet sleep they had died,
 And feared no ill. And she who thus had slain
 Those fruits of love, the folk saw not again,
 Nor knew where she was gone ; yet she died not,
 But fleeing, somehow, from that fatal spot,
 She came to Athens, and there long did dwell,
 Whose after life I list not here to tell. 1192

But as for Jason ;—Creon now being slain,
 And Corinth kingless, every man was fain,
 Remembering Jason's wisdom and sharp sword,
 To have the hero for their king and lord.
 So on his weary brows they set the crown,
 And he began to rule that noble town.
 And 'midst all things, somewhat his misery
 Was dulled unto him, as the days went by,
 And he began again to cast his eyes 1201
 . On lovely things, and hope began to rise

Once more within his heart.

But on a day
From out the goodly town he took his way,
To where, beneath the cliffs of Cenchreæ,
Lay Argo, looking o'er the ridgy sea,
Being fain once more to ponder o'er past days,
Ere he should set his face to winning praise
Among the shouts of men and clash of steel.

But when he reached the well-remembered
keel, 1210

The sun was far upon his downward way,
At afternoon of a bright summer day.
Hot was it, and still o'er the long rank grass,
Beneath the hull, a widening shade did pass ;
And further off, the sunny daisied sward,
The raised oars with their creeping shadows
barred ;

And grey shade from the hills of Cenchreæ
Began to move on toward the heaving sea.

So Jason, lying in the shadow dark 1219
Cast by the stem, the warble of the lark,
The chirrup of the cricket, well could hear ;
And now and then the sound would come anear
Of some hind shouting o'er his laden wain.
But looking o'er the blue and heaving plain,
Sailless it was, and beaten by no oar,
And on the yellow edges of the shore
The ripple fell in murmur soft and low,
As with wide-sweeping wings the gulls did go
About the breakers crying plaintively. 1229

But Jason, looking out across the sea,
Beheld the signs of wind a-drawing nigh,
Gathering about the clear cold eastern sky,
And many an evening then he thought upon
Ere yet the quays of Æa they had won,

And longings that had long been gathering
 Stirred in his heart, and now he felt the sting
 Of life within him, and at last he said :—
 ‘ Why should I move about as move the dead,
 And take no heed of what all men desire ?
 Once more I feel within my heart the fire
 That drave me forth unto the white-walled town,
 Leaving the sunny slopes, and thick-leaved crown
 Of grey old Pelion, that alone I knew, 1243
 Great deeds and wild, and desperate things to do.

‘ Ah ! the strange life of happiness and woe
 That I have led, since my young feet did go
 From that grey, peaceful, much-beloved abode,
 But now, indeed, will I cast off the load
 Of memory of vain hopes that came to nought,
 Of rapturous joys with biting sorrows bought.
 The past is past, though I cannot forget 1251
 Those days, with long life laid before me yet.

‘ Ah, but one moment, ere I turn the page,
 And leave regret to white hairs and to age.

‘ Once did I win a noble victory,
 I won a kingdom, and I cast it by
 For rest and peace, and rest and peace are gone.
 I had a fair love, that loved me alone,
 And made me that I am in all men’s eyes ;
 And like my hard-earned kingdom, my fair prize,
 I cast my tender heart, my Love away ; 1261
 Yet failed I not to love, until a day,
 A day I nigh forget, took all from me
 That once I had.—And she is gone, yea, she
 Whose innocent sweet eyes and tender hands
 Made me a mocking unto distant lands :
 Alas, poor child ! yet is that as a dream,

1264-7 *In place of these the first edition had the single line:*
 That once I had—yet is that as a dream,

And still my life a happy life I deem,
 But ah ! so short, so short ! for I am left
 Of love, of honour, and of joy bereft— 1270
 And yet not dead—ah, if I could but see
 But once again her who delivered me
 From death and many troubles, then no more
 Would I turn backward from the shadowy shore,
 And all my life would seem but perfect gain.

‘Alas ! what hope is this ? is it in vain
 I long to see her ? Lo, am I not young ?
 In many a song my past deeds have been sung,
 And these my hands that guided Argo through
 The blue Symplegades, still deeds may do.
 For now the world has swerved from truth and
 right, 1281

Cumbered with monsters, empty of delight,
 And, ’midst all this, what honour I may win,
 That she may know of and rejoice therein,
 And come to seek me, and upon my throne
 May find me sitting, worshipped, and alone.
 Ah ! if it should be, how should I rejoice
 To hear once more that once beloved voice
 Rise through the burden of dull words, well-
 known ;

How should I clasp again my love, mine own,
 And set the crown upon her golden head,
 And with the eyes of lovers newly wed, 1292
 How should we gaze each upon each again.

‘O hope not vain ! O surely not quite vain !
 For, with the next returning light will I
 Cast off my moody sorrow utterly,
 And once more live my life as in times past,
 And ’mid the chance of war the die will cast.

‘And surely, whatso great deeds have been
 done,

Since with my fellows the Gold Fleece I won,
Still, here, some wild bull clears the frightened
fields ;

There, a great lion cleaves the sevenfold shields ;
There, dwells some giant robber of the land ;
There, whirls some woman-slayer's red right
hand.

Yea, what is this they speak of even now,
That Theseus, having brought his conquering
prow

From lying Crete, unto the fairwalled town,
Now gathers folk, since there are coming down
The shielded women of the Asian plain,
Myriads past counting, in the hope to gain
The mastery of this lovely land of Greece ?
So be it, surely shall I snatch fair peace
From out the hand of war, and calm delight
From the tumultuous horror of the fight.'

So saying, gazing still across the sea
Heavy with days and nights of misery,
His eyes waxed dim, and calmer still he grew,
Still pondering over times and things he knew,
While now the sun had sunk behind the hill,
And from a white-thorn nigh a thrush did fill
The balmy air with echoing minstrelsy,
And cool the night-wind blew across the sea,
And round about the soft-winged bats did sweep.

So 'midst all this at last he fell asleep,
Nor did his eyes behold another day,
For Argo, slowly rotting all away,
Had dropped a timber here, and there an oar,
All through that year, but people of the shore
Set all again in order as it fell.

But now the stempost, that had carried well,
 The second rafter in King Pelias' hall, ¹³³¹
 Began at last to quiver towards its fall,
 And whether loosed by some divinity,
 Or that the rising wind from off the sea
 Blew full upon it, surely I know not—
 But, when the day dawned, still on the same
 spot,
 Beneath the ruined stem did Jason lie
 Crushed, and all dead of him that here can die.

What more ?—Some shepherd of the lone grey
 slope, ¹³³⁹
 Drawn to the sandy sea-beach by the hope
 Of trapping quick-eared rabbits, found him there,
 And running back, called from the vineyards fair,
 Vine-dressers and their mates who through the
 town
 Ere then had borne their well-filled baskets
 brown,
 These, looking on his dead face, straightway knew
 This was the king that all men kneeled unto,
 Who dwelt between the seas ; therefore they
 made
 A bier of white-thorn boughs, and thereon laid
 * The dead man, straightening every drawn-up
 limb ; ¹³⁴⁹
 And, casting flowers and green leaves over him,
 They bore him unto Corinth, where the folk,
 When they knew all, into loud wailing broke,
 Calling him mighty hero, crown of kings.
 But him ere long to where the sea-wind sings
 O'er the grey hill-side did they bear again.
 And there, where he had hoped that hope in vain,
 They laid him in a marble tomb carved fair

With histories of his mighty deeds ; and there
Such games as once he loved yet being alive,
They held for ten days, and withal did give
Gifts to the Gods with many a sacrifice, 1361
But chiefest, among all the things of price,
Argo they offered to the Deity
Who shakes the hard earth with the rolling sea.

And now is all that ancient story told
Of him who won the guarded Fleece of Gold.

MISCELLANEOUS POEMS

1856-69

WINTER WEATHER ¹

WE rode together
In the winter weather
 To the broad mead under the hill ;
Though the skies did shiver
With the cold, the river
 Ran, and was never still.

No cloud did darken
The night ; we did hearken
 The hound's bark far away.
It was solemn midnight 10
In that dread, dread night,
 In the years that have pass'd for aye.

Two rode beside me,
My banner did hide me,
 As it droop'd adown from my lance ;
With its deep blue trapping,
The mail over-lapping,
 My gallant horse did prance.

So ever together
In the sparkling weather 20
 Moved my banner and lance ;
And its laurel trapping,
The steel over-lapping,
 The stars saw quiver and dance.

¹ Reprinted from *The Oxford and Cambridge Magazine*,
January 1856.

We met together
In the winter weather
By the town-walls under the hill ;
His mail-rings came clinking,
They broke on my thinking,
For the night was hush'd and still. 30

Two rode beside him,
His banner did hide him,
As it droop'd down strait from his lance ;
With its blood-red trapping,
The mail over-lapping,
His mighty horse did prance.

And ever together
In the solemn weather
Moved his banner and lance ;
And the holly trapping, 40
The steel overlapping,
Did shimmer and shiver, and dance.

Back reined the squires
Till they saw the spires
Over the city wall ;
Ten fathoms between us,
No dames could have seen us,
Tilt from the city wall.

There we sat upright
Till the full midnight 50
Should be told from the city chimes :
Sharp from the towers
Leapt forth the showers
Of the many clanging rhymes.

'Twas the midnight hour,
Deep from the tower
 Boom'd the following bell ;
Down go our lances,
Shout for the lances !
 The last toll was his knell.

60

There he lay, dying ;
He had, for his lying,
 A spear in his traitorous mouth ;
A false tale made he
Of my true, true lady ;
 But the spear went through his mouth.

In the winter weather
We rode back together
 From the broad mead under the hill ;
And the cock sung his warning
As it grew toward morning,
 But the far-off hound was still.

70

Black grew his tower
As we rode down lower,
 Black from the barren hill ;
And our horses strode
Up the winding road
 To the gateway dim and still.

At the gate of his tower,
In the quiet hour,
 We laid his body there ;
But his helmet broken,
We took as a token ;
 Shout for my lady fair !

80

We rode back together
 In the winter weather
 From the broad mead under the hill ;
 No cloud did darken
 The night ; we did hearken
 How the hound bay'd from the hill. 90

THE GOD OF THE POOR ¹

THERE was a lord that hight Maltête,
 Among great lords he was right great,
 On poor folk trod he like the dirt,
 None but God might do him hurt.

Deus est Deus pauperum.

With a grace of prayers sung loud and late
 Many a widow's house he ate,
 Many a poor knight at his hands
 Lost his house and narrow lands.

Deus est Deus pauperum. 10

He burnt the harvests many a time,
 He made fair houses heaps of lime ;
 Whatso man loved wife or maid
 Of Evil-head was sore afraid.

Deus est Deus pauperum.

He slew good men and spared the bad ;
 Too long a day the foul dog had,
 As all dogs will have their day ;
 But God is as strong as man, I say.

Deus est Deus pauperum. 20

¹ Reprinted from *The Fortnightly Review*. August 1868.

For a valiant knight, men called Boncœur,
Had hope he should not long endure,
And gathered to him much good folk,
Hardy hearts to break the yoke.

Deus est Deus pauperum.

But Boncœur deemed it would be vain
To strive his guarded house to gain ;
Therefore, within a little while,
He set himself to work by guile.

Deus est Deus pauperum. 30

He knew that Maltête loved right well
Red gold and heavy ; if from hell
The devil had cried, ' Take this gold cup,'
Down had he gone to fetch it up.

Deus est Deus pauperum.

Twenty poor men's lives were nought
To him, beside a ring well wrought.
The pommel of his hunting-knife
Was worth ten times a poor man's life.

Deus est Deus pauperum. 40

A squire new-come from over sea
Boncœur called to him privily,
And when he knew his lord's intent,
Clad like a churl therefrom he went.

Deus est Deus pauperum.

But when he came where dwelt Maltête,
With few words did he pass the gate,
For Maltête built him walls anew,
And, wageless, folk from field he drew.

Deus est Deus pauperum. 50

Now passed the squire through this and that,
Till he came to where Sir Maltête sat,
And over red wine wagged his beard,
Then spoke the 'squire as one afeard.

Deus est Deus pauperum.

' Lord, give me grace, for privily
I have a little word for thee.'
' Speak out,' said Maltête, ' have no fear,
For how can thy life to thee be dear ? '

Deus est Deus pauperum. 60

' Such a one I know,' he said,
' Who hideth store of money red.'
Maltête grinned at him cruelly.
' Thou florin-maker, come anigh.

Deus est Deus pauperum.

' E'en such as thou once preached of gold,
And showed me lies in books full old.
Nought gat I but evil brass,
Therefore came he to the worser pass.

Deus est Deus pauperum. 70

' Hast thou will to see his skin ?
I keep my heaviest marks therein,
For since nought else of wealth had he,
I deemed full well he owed it me.'

Deus est Deus pauperum.

' Nought know I of philosophy,'
The other said, ' nor do I lie.
Before the moon begins to shine,
May all this heap of gold be thine.

Deus est Deus pauperum. 80

‘ Ten leagues hence a man there is
Who seemeth to know little bliss,
And yet full many a pound of gold
A dry well nigh his house doth hold.

Deus est Deus pauperum.

‘ John-a-Wood is he called, fair lord,
Nor know I whence he hath this hoard.’
Then Maltête said, ‘ As God made me,
A wizard over-bold is he !

Deus est Deus pauperum. 90

‘ It were a good deed, as I am a knight,
To burn him in a fire bright ;
This John-a-Wood shall surely die,
And his gold in my strong chest shall lie.

Deus est Deus pauperum.

‘ This very night I make mine avow,
The truth of this mine eyes shall know.’
Then spoke an old knight in the hall,
‘ Who knoweth what things may befall ?

Deus est Deus pauperum. 100

‘ I rede thee go with a great rout,
For thy foes ride right thick about.’
‘ Thou and the devil may keep my foes,
Thou redest me this gold to lose.

Deus est Deus pauperum.

‘ I shall go but with some four or five,
So shall I take my thief alive.
For if a great rout he shall see,
Will he not hide his wealth from me ? ’

Deus est Deus pauperum. 110

The old knight muttered under his breath,
'Then mayhap ye shall ride to death.'
But Maltête turned him quickly round,
'Bind me this grey-beard under ground !
Deus est Deus pauperum.

'Because ye are old, ye think to jape.
Take heed, ye shall not long escape.
When I come back safe, old carl, perdie,
Thine head shall brush the linden-tree.'
Deus est Deus pauperum. 120

Therewith he rode with his five men,
And Boncœur's spy, for good leagues ten,
Until they left the beaten way,
And dusk it grew at end of day.
Deus est Deus pauperum.

There, in a clearing of the wood,
Was John's house, neither fair nor good.
In a ragged plot anigh,
Thin coleworts grew but wretchedly.
Deus est Deus pauperum. 130

John-a-Wood in his doorway sat,
Turning over this and that,
And chiefly how he best might thrive,
For he had will enough to live.
Deus est Deus pauperum.

Green coleworts from a wooden bowl
He ate ; but careful was his soul,
For if he saw another day,
Thenceforth was he in Boncœur's pay.
Deus est Deus pauperum. 140

So when he saw how Maltête came,
He said, 'Beginneth now the game !'
And in the doorway did he stand
Trembling, with hand joined fast to hand.

Deus est Deus pauperum.

When Maltête did this carle behold
Somewhat he doubted of his gold,
But cried out, 'Where is now thy store
Thou hast through books of wicked lore ?'

Deus est Deus pauperum. 150

Then said the poor man, right humbly,
'Fair lord, this was not made by me,
I found it in mine own dry well,
And had a mind thy grace to tell.

Deus est Deus pauperum.

'Therefrom, my lord, a cup I took
This day ; that thou thereon might look,
And know me to be leal and true,'
And from his coat the cup he drew.

Deus est Deus pauperum. 160

Then Maltête took it in his hand,
Nor knew he aught that it used to stand
On Boncœur's cupboard many a day.
'Go on,' he said, 'and show the way.

Deus est Deus pauperum.

'Give me thy gold, and thou shalt live,
Yea, in my house thou well may'st thrive.'
John turned about, and 'gan to go
Unto the wood with footsteps slow.

Deus est Deus pauperum. 170

But as they passed by John's woodstack,
Growled Maltête, ' Nothing now doth lack
Wherewith to light a merry fire,
And give my wizard all his hire.'

Deus est Deus pauperum.

The western sky was red as blood,
Darker grew the oaken-wood ;
' Thief and carle, where are ye gone ?
Why are we in the wood alone ?

Deus est Deus pauperum. 180

' What is the sound of this mighty horn ?
—Ah, God ! that ever I was born !
The basnets flash from tree to tree ;
Show me, thou Christ, the way to flee !'

Deus est Deus pauperum.

Boncœur it was, with fifty men,
Maltête was but one to ten,
And his own folk prayed for grace,
With empty hands in that lone place.

Deus est Deus pauperum. 190

' Grace shall ye have,' Boncœur said,
' All of you but Evil-head.'
Lowly could that great lord be.
Who could pray so well as he ?

Deus est Deus pauperum.

Then could Maltête howl and cry,
Little will he had to die.
Soft was his speech, now it was late,
But who had will to save Maltête ?

Deus est Deus pauperum. 200

They brought him to the house again,
And toward the road he looked in vain.
Lonely and bare was the great highway,
'Neath the gathering moonlight grey.

Deus est Deus pauperum.

They took off his gilt basnet,
That he should die there was no let ;
They took off his coat of steel,
A damned man he well might feel.

Deus est Deus pauperum. 210

' Will ye all be rich as kings,
Lacking nought of all good things ? '
' Nothing do we lack this eve ;
When thou art dead, how can we grieve ? '

Deus est Deus pauperum.

' Let me drink water ere I die,
None henceforth comes my lips anigh.'
They brought it him in that bowl of wood.
He said ' This is but poor men's blood ! '

Deus est Deus pauperum. 220

They brought it him in the cup of gold.
He said ' The women I have sold
Have wept it full of salt for me ;
I shall die gaping thirstily.'

Deus est Deus pauperum.

On the threshold of that poor homestead
They smote off his Evil-head ;
They set it high on a great spear,
And rode away with merry cheer.

Deus est Deus pauperum. 230

At the dawn, in lordly state,
They rode to Maltête's castle-gate.
' Whoso willeth laud to win,
Make haste to let your masters in ! '

Deus est Deus pauperum.

Forthwith opened they the gate,
No man was sorry for Maltête.
Boncœur conquered all his lands,
A good knight was he of his hands.

Deus est Deus pauperum. 240

Good men he loved, and hated bad ;
Joyful days and sweet he had ;
Good deeds did he plenteously ;
Beneath him folk lived frank and free.

Deus est Deus pauperum.

He lived long, with merry days ;
None said aught of him but praise.
God on him have full mercy ;
A good knight merciful was he.

Deus est Deus pauperum. 250

The great lord, called Maltête, is dead ;
Grass grows above his feet and head,
And a holly-bush grows up between
His rib-bones, gotten white and clean.

Deus est Deus pauperum.

A carle's sheep-dog certainly
Is a mightier thing than he.
Till London-Bridge shall cross the Nen,
Take we heed of such-like men.

Deus est Deus pauperum. 260

THE TWO SIDES OF THE RIVER ¹*The Youths.*

O WINTER, O white winter, wert thou gone
 No more within the wilds were I alone,
 Leaping with bent bow over stock and stone ;
 No more alone my love the lamp should burn,
 Watching the weary spindle twist and turn,
 Or o'er the web hold back her tears and yearn.
 O winter, O white winter, wert thou gone !

The Maidens.

Sweet thoughts fly swiffler than the drifting
 snow,
 And with the twisting thread sweet longings
 grow,
 And o'er the web sweet pictures come and go ;
 For no white winter are we long alone.

The Youths.

O stream, so changed, what hast thou done to
 me,
 That I thy glittering ford no more can see
 Wreathing with white her fair feet lovingly ?
 See in the rain she stands ; and, looking down
 With frightened eyes upon thy whirlpools brown,
 Drops to her feet again her girded gown.
 O hurrying, turbid stream, what hast thou done ?

Reprinted from *The Fortnightly Review*, October 1868.

The Maidens.

The clouds lift, telling of a fairer day,
When through the thin stream I shall take my
way, 20
Girt round with gold, and garlanded with may.
What rushing stream can keep us long alone ?

The Youths.

O burning Sun ! O master of unrest !
Why must we, toiling, cast away the best,
Now when the bird sleeps by his empty nest ?
See, with my garland lying at her feet,
In lonely labour stands mine own, my sweet,
Above the quern, half-filled with half-ground
wheat.
O red task-master, that thy flames were done !

The Maidens.

O love, to-night across the half-shorn plain,
Shall I not go to meet the yellow wain, 31
A look of love at end of toil to gain ?
What flaming sun can keep us long alone ?

The Youths.

To-morrow, said I, is grape-gathering o'er ;
To-morrow and our loves are twinned no more.
To-morrow came, to bring us woe and war.
What have I done, that I should stand with
these,
Hearkening the dread shouts borne upon the
breeze,
While she, far off, sits weeping 'neath her trees ?
Alas ! O kings, what is it ye have done ? 40

The Maidens.

Come love, delay not, come and slay my dread;
 Already is the banquet-table spread,
 In the cool chamber flower-strewn is my bed.
 Come, love ; what king can keep us long alone ?

The Youths.

O city, city, open thou thy gate ;
 See with life snatched from out the hand of fate,
 Still on this glittering triumph must I wait.
 Are not her hands stretched out to me ? her eyes,
 Are they not weary as each new hope dies,
 And lone before her still the long road lies ?
 O golden city, fain would I be gone ! 51

The Maidens.

Ah ! thou art happy amid shouts and songs,
 And all that unto conquering men belongs ;
 Night hath for me no fear, and day no wrongs.
 What brazen city-gates can keep us lone ?

The Youths.

O long, long road, how bare thou art, and grey ;
 Hill after hill thou climbest, and the day
 Is ended now, O moonlit endless way !
 And she is standing where the rushes grow,
 And still with white hand shades her anxious
 brow, 60
 Though 'neath the world the sun has fallen now.
 O dreary road, when will thy leagues be done ?

The Maidens.

O tremblest thou, grey road, or do my feet
Tremble with joy thy flinty face to meet
Because my love's eyes soon mine eyes shall
greet ?

No heart thou hast to keep us long alone.

The Youths.

O wilt thou ne'er depart, thou heavy night ?
When will thy slaying bring on the morning
bright,
That leads my weary feet to my delight ? 69
Why lingerest thou, filling with wandering fears
My lone love's tired heart ; her eyes with tears,
For thoughts like sorrow for the vanished years ?
Weaver of ill thoughts, when wilt thou begone ?

The Maidens.

Love, to the East are thine eyes turned, as mine,
In patient watching for the night's decline ?
And hast thou noted this grey widening line ?
Can any darkness keep us long alone ?

The Youths.

O day ! O day ! is this a little thing
That thou so long unto thy life must cling
Because I gave thee such a welcoming ? 80
I called thee king of all felicity,
I praised thee that thou broughtest joy so nigh—
Thine hours are turned to years ; thou wilt not
die.

O day so longed for, would that thou wert gone !

The Maidens.

The light fails, love ; the long day soon shall be
Nought but a pensive, happy memory,
Blessed for the tales it told to thee and me.
How hard it was, O love, to be alone.

ON THE EDGE OF THE WILDERNESS ¹

Puellæ.

WHENCE comest thou, and whither goest thou ?
Abide, abide ! longer the shadows grow ;
What hopest thou the dark to thee will show ?
Abide, abide ! for we are happy here.

Amans.

Why should I name the land across the sea
Wherein I first took hold on misery ?
Why should I name the land that flees from me ?
Let me depart since ye are happy here.

Puellæ.

What wilt thou do within the desert place
Whereto thou turnest now thy careful face ?
Stay but a while to tell us of thy case. 11
Abide, abide ! for we are happy here.

Amans.

What, nigh the journey's end shall I abide,
When in the waste mine own love wanders wide
When from all men for me she still doth hide ?
Let me depart, since ye are happy here.

¹ Reprinted from *The Fortnightly Review*, April 1869.

Puellæ.

Nay, nay ; but rather she forgetteth thee,
To sit upon the shore of some warm sea,
Or in green gardens where sweet fountains be.
Abide, abide ! for we are happy here. 20

Amans.

Will ye then keep me from the wilderness,
Where I at least, alone with my distress,
The quiet land of changing dreams may bless ?
Let me depart, since ye are happy here.

Puellæ.

Forget the false forgetter, and be wise,
And 'mid these clinging hands and loving eyes,
Dream not in vain thou knowest paradise.
Abide, abide ! for we are happy here.

Amans.

Ah ! with your sweet eyes shorten not the day,
Nor let your gentle hands my journey stay !
Perchance love is not wholly cast away. 31
Let me depart, since ye are happy here.

Puellæ.

Pluck love away, as thou wouldst pluck a thorn
From out thy flesh ; for why shouldst thou be
born
To bear a life so wasted and forlorn ?
Abide, abide ! for we are happy here.

Amans.

Yea, why then was I born, since hope is pain,
And life a lingering death, and faith but vain,
And love the loss of all I seemed to gain ?

Let me depart, since ye are happy here. 49

Puellæ.

Dost thou believe that this shall ever be,
That in our land no face thou e'er shalt see,
No voice thou e'er shalt hear to gladden thee ?

Abide, abide ! for we are happy here.

Amans.

No longer do I know of good or bad,
I have forgotten that I once was glad :
I do but chase a dream that I have had.

Let me depart, since ye are happy here.

Puellæ.

Stay ! take one image for thy dreamful night ;
Come look at her, who in the world's despite
Weeps for delaying love and lost delight. 51

Abide, abide ! for we are happy here.

Amans.

Mock me not till to-morrow. Mock the dead—
They will not heed it, or turn round the head,
To note who faithless are, and who are wed.

Let me depart, since ye are happy here.

Puellæ.

We mock thee not. Hast thou not heard of those
Whose faithful love the loved heart holds so
close,
That death must wait till one word lets it loose.
Abide, abide ! for we are happy here. 60

Amans.

I hear you not : the wind from off the waste
Sighs like a song that bids me make good haste
The wave of sweet forgetfulness to taste.
Let me depart, since ye are happy here.

Puellæ.

Come back ! like such a singer is the wind,
As to a sad tune sings fair words and kind,
That he with happy tears all eyes may blind.
Abide, abide ! for we are happy here.

Amans.

Did I not hear her sweet voice cry from far,
That o'er the lonely waste fair fields there are,
Fair days that know not any change or care ?
Let me depart, since ye are happy here. 72

Puellæ.

Oh no, not far thou heardest her, but nigh—
Nigh, 'twixt the waste's edge and the darkling
sky.
Turn back again, too soon it is to die.
Abide ! a little while be happy here.

A mans.

How with the lapse of lone years could I strive,
 And can I die now that thou biddest live ?
 What joy this space 'twixt birth and death can
 give.

Can we depart, who are so happy here ? 80

HAPLESS LOVE¹*Hic.*

WHY do you sadly go alone,
 O fair friend ? Are your pigeons flown,
 Or has the thunder killed your bees,
 Or he-goats barked your apple-trees ?
 Or has the red-eared bull gone mad,
 Or the mead turned from good to bad ?
 Or did you find the merchant lied
 About the gay cloth scarlet-dyed ?
 And did he sell you brass for gold,
 Or is there murrain in the fold ? 10

Ille.

Nay, no such thing has come to me.
 In bird and beast and field and tree,
 And all the things that make my store,
 Am I as rich as e'er before ;
 And no beguilers have I known
 But Love and Death ; and Love is gone,
 Therefore am I far more than sad,
 And no more know good things from bad.

Hic.

Woe worth the while ! Yet coming days
 May bring another, good to praise. 20

¹ Reprinted from *Good Words*, April 1869.

Ille.

Nay, never will I love again,
For loving is but joyful pain
If all be at its very best ;
A rose-hung bower of all unrest ;
But when at last things go awry,
What tongue can tell its misery ?
And soon or late shall this befall—
The gods send death upon us all.

Hic.

Nay, then, but tell me how she died,
And how it did to thee betide
To love her ; for the wise men say
To talk of grief drives grief away.

30

Ille.

Alas, O friend, it happed to me
To see her passing daintily
Before my homestead day by day.
Would she had gone some other way !
For one day, as she rested there
Beneath the long-leaved chestnuts fair,
In very midst of mid-day heat,
I cast myself before her feet,
And prayed for pity and for love.
How could I dream that words could move
A woman ? Soft she looked at me ;
'Thou sayest that I a queen should be,'
She answered with a gathering smile ;
'Well, I will wait a little while,
Perchance the gods thy will have heard.'

40

And even with that latest word,
The clash of arms we heard anigh ;

And from the wood rode presently 50
A fair knight well apparelled.
And even as she turned her head,
He shortened rein, and cried aloud—
'O beautiful, among the crowd
Of queens thou art the queen of all!'

But when she let her eyelids fall,
And blushed for pleasure, and for shame,
Then quickly to her feet he came,
And said, 'Thou shalt be queen indeed ;
For many a man this day shall bleed 60
Because of me, and leave me king
Ere noontide fall to evening.'

Then on his horse he set the maid
Before him, and no word she said
Clear unto me, but murmuring
Beneath her breath some gentle thing,
She clung unto him lovingly ;
Nor took they any heed of me.

Through shade and sunlight on they rode,
But 'neath the green boughs I abode, 70
Nor noted aught that might betide.
The sun waned, and the shade spread wide ;
The birds came twittering over head ;
But there I lay as one long dead.

But ere the sunset, came a rout
Of men-at-arms with song and shout,
And bands of lusty archers tall,
And spearmen marching like a wall,
Their banners hanging heavily,
That no man might their blazon see ; 80
And ere their last noise died away,
I heard the clamour of the fray

That swelled, and died, and rose again ;
Yet still I brooded o'er my pain
Until the red sun nigh was set,
And then methought I e'en might get
The rest I sought, nor wake forlorn
Midst fellow men the morrow morn ;
So forth I went unto the field,
One man without a sword or shield. 90

But none was there to give me rest,
Tried was it who was worst and best,
And slain men lay on every side ;
For flight and chase were turned aside,
And all men got on toward the sea ;
But as I went right heavily
I saw how close beside the way
Over a knight a woman lay
Lamenting, and I knew in sooth
My love, and drew a-near for ruth. 100

There lay the knight who would be king
Dead slain before the evening,
And ever my love cried out and said,
' O sweet, in one hour art thou dead
And I am but a maiden still !
The gods this day have had their will
Of thee and me ; whom all these years
They kept apart ; that now with tears
And blood and bitter misery
Our parting and our death might be.' 110

Then did she rise and look around,
And took his drawn sword from the ground
And on its bitter point she fell—
No more, no more, O friend, to tell !

No more about my life, O friend !
One course it shall have to the end.

O Love, come from the shadowy shore,
And by my homestead as before,
Go by with sunlight on thy feet !
Come back, if but to mock me, sweet ! 120

Hic.

O fool ! what love of thine was this,
Who never gave thee any kiss,
Nor would have wept if thou hadst died ?
Go now, behold the world is wide.
Soon shalt thou find some dainty maid
To sit with in thy chestnut shade,
To rear fair children up for thee,
As those few days pass silently,
Uncounted, that may yet remain
'Twixt thee and that last certain pain. 130

Ille.

Art thou a God ? Nay, if thou wert,
Wouldst thou belike know of my hurt,
And what might sting and what might heal ?
The world goes by 'twixt woe and weal
And heeds me not ; I sit apart
Amid old memories. To my heart
My love and sorrow must I press ;
It knoweth its own bitterness.

PREFATORY SONNET TO
'THE STORY OF GRETTIR THE STRONG'

(1869)

A LIFE scarce worth the living, a poor fame
Scarce worth the winning, in a wretched land,
Where fear and pain go upon either hand,
As toward the end men fare without an aim
Unto the dull grey dark from whence they came :
Let them alone, the unshadowed sheer rocks
stand

Over the twilight graves of that poor band,
Who count so little in the great world's game !

Nay, with the dead I deal not ; this man lives,
And that which carried him through good and ill,
Stern against fate while his voice echoed still
From rock to rock, now he lies silent, strives
With wasting time, and through its long lapse
gives

Another friend to me, life's void to fill.

A PROLOGUE IN VERSE

(to the Volsunga Saga, 1870)

O HEARKEN, ye who speak the English Tongue,
How in a waste land ages long ago,
The very heart of the North bloomed into song
After long brooding o'er this tale of woe !

Hearken, and marvel how it might be so,
That such a sweetness so well crowned could be
Betwixt the ice-hills and the cold grey sea.

Or rather marvel not, that those should cling
Unto the thoughts of great lives passed away,
Whom God has stripped so bare of everything,
Save the one longing to wear through their
day, 11

In fearless wise ; the hope the Gods to stay,
When at that last tide gathered wrong and hate
Shall meet blind yearning on the Fields of Fate.

Yea, in the first grey dawning of our race,
This ruth-crowned tangle to sad hearts was
dear.

Then rose a seeming sun, the lift gave place
Unto a seeming heaven, far off, but clear ;
But that passed too, and afternoon is here ;
Nor was the morn so fruitful or so long 20
But we may hearken when ghosts moan of wrong.

For as amid the clatter of the town
When eve comes on with unabated noise,
The soaring wind will sometimes drop adown
And bear unto our chamber the sweet voice
Of bells that 'mid the swallows do rejoice,
Half-heard, to make us sad, so we awhile
With echoed grief life's dull pain may beguile.

Naught vague, naught base our tale, that seems
to say,—

‘ Be wide-eyed, kind ; curse not the hand that
smites ; 30

Curse not the kindness of a past good day,
Or hope of love ; cast by all earth's delights,
For very love . through weary days and
nights,

Abide thou, striving, howsoe'er in vain,
The inmost love of one more heart to gain ! ’

So draw ye round and hearken, English Folk,
 Unto the best tale pity ever wrought !
 Of how from dark to dark bright Sigurd broke,
 Of Brynhild's glorious soul with love dis-
 traught, 39
 Of Gudrun's weary wandering unto naught,
 Of utter love defeated utterly,
 Of Grief too strong to give Love time to die !

RHYME SLAYETH SHAME

(*Atlantic Monthly*, February 1870)

IF as I come unto her she might hear,
 If words might reach her when from her I go,
 Then speech a little of my heart might show,
 Because indeed nor joy nor grief nor fear
 Silence my love ; but her grey eyes and clear,
 Truer than truth, pierce through my weal and
 woe ;
 The world fades with its words, and naught
 I know
 But that my changed life to My Life is near.

Go, then, poor rhymes, who know my heart
 indeed,
 And sing to her the words I cannot say,—
 That Love has slain Time, and knows no to-day
 And no to-morrow ; tell her of my need,
 And how I follow where her footsteps lead,
 Until the veil of speech death draws away.

MAY GROWN A-COLD

(Atlantic Monthly, May 1870)

O CERTAINLY, no month this is but May !
 Sweet earth and sky, sweet birds of happy song.
 Do make thee happy now, and thou art strong,
 And many a tear thy love shall wipe away
 And make the dark night merrier than the day,
 Straighten the crooked paths and right the
 wrong,
 And tangle bliss so that it tarry long.
 Go cry aloud the hope the Heavens do say !

Nay, what is this ? and wherefore lingerest
 thou ?
 Why sayest thou the sky is hard as stone ?
 Why sayest thou the thrushes sob and moan ?
 Why sayest thou the east tears bloom and
 bough ?
 Why seem the sons of man so hopeless now ?
 Thy love is gone, poor wretch, thou art alone !

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